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Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator)

for contributors to the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*

## 1997 - Records Still Flowing in

1997 has been a good year in many ways. The literature survey has been greatly speeded up with a great deal of work done by Guy Kirwan. The year also saw the most observer reports received in any year since the project started bar one. I personally have managed to visit Arabia more times this year than any other, with surveys to Yemen in February, Oman in March and Abu Dhabi in July. At the time of writing another visit to Yemen is planned for December and early January 1998. Notes on the first three surveys appear in this issue. I was particularly pleased to have at last been able to get to the region of eastern Yemen north of the Wadi Hadramaut. This huge region of 30 squares (75,000 square kilometres) was unknown territory for the ABBA project. I am especially grateful to Omar al Saghir for making essential arrangements with bedouin guides and for his company.

The writing up of the final atlas continues but unfortunately not quite as quickly as I had hoped. I have had a lot of pressures on my time this year that have slowed progress. In response to the announcement last year for assistance with specific tasks I now have offers of expert help in respect of the world range maps for the species accounts, general climate, habitat etc maps for Arabia and action is in hand to enhance database features.

About 20 authors have kindly agreed to author one or more species accounts but there are still several species accounts unallocated to an author. Therefore if any reader feels able to assist I shall be pleased to hear from them. Species account authors are provided with a species print of all the information on the database, up to date maps and details of the format to follow as well as other aids.

Despite 1997 being a good year for receipt of records a number of observers have been surprised that I am still collecting data now that writing up the final atlas has started and that I am still interested in common species in well watched places. There are several points here. Firstly a database like this can never have too many records. Secondly it is surprising that for so many common species the amount of data available, for example clutch size, nest site, number of broods is still very patchy. I would urge every observer that if in doubt send in the record, especially if it is a confirmed breeding. The main point I would make though is that

the database will not finish when the atlas appears, I hope it will go on and on. Provided I can secure a small amount of sponsorship funds to maintain the database I intend to keep adding to it. Not only will this improve the historical aspect of the atlas (maybe for someone else to do another atlas in 30 years time?) but it will also provide a fully up to date information resource which is available to anyone who may need it. Which reminds me, if anyone needs information on a particular species, a region, or even a period, let me know and I will be pleased to assist where I can. The database will be shared as much as practicable and the ABBA project has been very pleased to have contributed information for BWP (including the updated concise edition just out), recent Middle East field guides, and the breeding bird atlases of the UAE and Oman.

My best wishes to everyone for 1998, do not forget to send in those remaining records from the 1997 season.

*Michael Jennings*

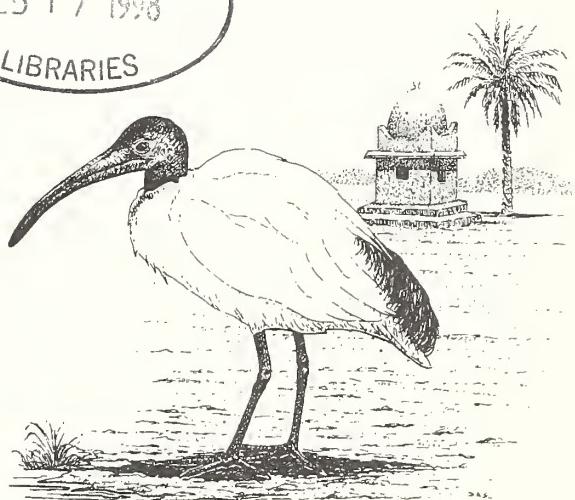
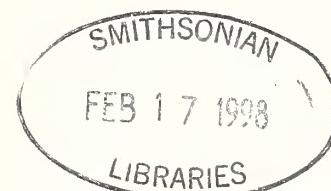


Fig. 1. A family of sacred ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* has been seen in Yemen this year, good but not conclusive evidence of breeding. (Page 17)

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## Ostriches Breed Again in Arabia

In February and March 1997 ostrich chicks *Struthio camelus* hatched within the acacia savannah of the 2,200 km<sup>2</sup> Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in central Saudi Arabia. These chicks represent the first breeding by free-ranging ostriches in the Arabian Peninsula since the last Arabian ostrich was shot in northern Saudi Arabia, probably about 1940. The arrival of these almost wild chicks heralds a new phase in Saudi Arabia's ostrich restoration project.

The death of the last Arabian ostrich marked the extinction of the subspecies *S. c. syriacus*. Unlike other Arabian endemics, such as the Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx*, the Arabian ostrich was not represented in any captive collections. As part of wider programmes for the restoration of wildlife in Saudi Arabia the NCWCD took the decision to introduce the nearest living relative of *S. c. syriacus*, the Sudanese red-necked ostrich *S. c. camelus*, to fill the niche left vacant by the extinction.

Captive breeding of pure *S. c. camelus* took place at the NWRC, near Taif. Releases of captive bred ostriches between June 1994 and December 1996 have resulted in the establishment of 13 adult birds inside the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area, which has also been the site of reintroductions of the houbara bustard *Chlamydotis undulata macqueeni*, Arabian oryx, and sand gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*. Good winter rainfall and a flush of new plant growth had enabled these free-ranging ostriches to produce a total of four nests, in ABBA square HB21, by March 1997. Hatching at two of these nests produced four and eight chicks from clutches of 13 and 33 eggs, respectively, thus doubling the Mahazat as-Sayd ostrich population. By late April 1997 it was clear that the chicks had survived their most hazardous age, and appeared healthy and vigorous and were all doing well. The two groups had combined into one flock attended by one pair of the adults. The adults have radio transmitters so can be tracked easily allowing the chicks to be checked two or three times a week. The other two nests, containing eight and eleven eggs, were due to hatch in May 1997.

The latest news (September 1997) is that one of the adults was lost during a hot dry period and as a result the NWRC undertook to provide supplementary food for adults. The chicks, by this time nearly juvenile, appear better acclimatised to local conditions.

With the future of the Mahazat as-Sayd birds more secure new release sites are being prepared at the large protected areas of al Khunfah in the north. Birds will be placed in a fenced pre-release area in early 1998 and will be held there for 12 months before being let into the wild.

Philip J. Seddon, NWRC, PO Box 1086, Taif, Saudi Arabia.

## Recent Reports

The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months. Some relate to earlier years. Not all these records have been verified and some may not yet be accepted by local recorders.

### Grey heron *Ardea cinerea*

50 oversummered in 1996 at the al Hair water course south of Riyadh and one was seen carrying reeds (MB25). The species is judged as likely to breed soon (D James).

### Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

Dr Michel Clouet reported a flock of 128 on Socotra (UA02) on 16 November 1993. Is this a record?

### Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*

Several confirmed breeding records 1997 in Uruq Bani Maarid reserve in south central Saudi Arabia (T Wacher).

### Short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

Confirmed breeding in south central Saudi Arabia at the Uruq Bani Maarid reserve (LA15), young in the nest 1 April 1997 (T Wacher). Also talon grappling was noted in the UAE (WA28) on 18 May 1997 (S J Aspinall).

### Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

On eggs Das island (SB27) 24 April 1997 (L Reaney).

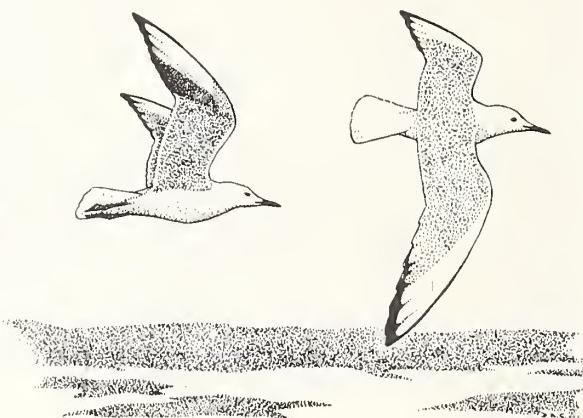


Fig. 2. The slender-billed gull *Larus genii* has still not yet been proved to breed in Arabia. However probable breeding was registered in July 1997 when Brian Meadows was repeatedly dive bombed over a period of half an hour by two birds. This was near an area of flooded subkha and phragmites (PA31) close to Jubail in the Eastern Province.

### Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Fully fledged juveniles squeaking repeatedly and being fed by an adult on beach near Jubail (PB31), late July 1997.

### African collared dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

Common in May 1996 at Wadi Steir (LA15) Uruq Bani Maarid reserve south central Saudi Arabia. Also present in the area January to July 1997 but status thought to be spring/summer visitor (T Wacher). This extends the regular range of the species eastwards from the Wajid sandstones (see main article below).

### Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

15-20 entering the crown of a doum palm on the Yemen Tihama (iB08) 27 March 1997 (D B Stanton). This is one of only a handful of records indicating the timing of breeding and nest location of this species.

### Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

In view of the report of potential breeding in Qatar in *Phoenix* 13, the following records of D A and D Perkins in Qatar in 1980's are relevant. A number of skylarks were singing and calling at a farm northwest of Umm Salal Ali (RA27) in June 1986 and on a farm 17 kms north of Mazra'at al Khor on 26 June 1986 (RA28).

### **Great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus***

Singing throughout summer in recent years along the al Hair water course (MB25/6) and often feeding young (D James). At Khafrah Marsh near Jubail (PB30) a juvenile soliciting food from adults May 1997 and adult carrying food 6 June 1997, (B S Meadows).

### **Booted warbler *Hippolais caligata***

Singing and young being fed by adults June 1996 al Hair water course south of Riyadh (MB25), (I Saville and D James).

### **Desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta***

Several records from the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre at Thumamah (MB27) north-west of Riyadh (T Wacher), the species continues to establish itself in central Arabia.

### **Corn bunting *Miliaria calandra***

More records of singing and courtship behaviour in north-east Saudi Arabia (NB32 and OB30) in 1996 (B S Meadows).

## **ABBA Survey 20: Eastern Yemen, February 1997**

The region to the north of the Wadi Hadramaut in eastern Yemen is one of the remotest parts of Arabia, certainly one of the least recorded ornithologically. All the previous ABBA records for this area of approximately 100,000 sq kms, amount to only a couple of dozen, mostly from L H Brown who visited Zamakh, Thamud and Sanau in October 1965 and wrote a short article, (*Journal of the Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 66:327-337). No one has been there in the last three decades. The present survey visited some 38 ABBA squares in this region. Of these 19 squares had no previous ABBA records at all and a further nine squares had only up to three species previously recorded. Just over 3,000 km were travelled on this survey all of it off the road. I was accompanied by Dr Omar al Sagher who carried out a separate survey of the status of wildlife and especially of houbara bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* in the region, as well as assisting with the aims of the ABBA project. Together we hired the services of two bedouin, Salem and Hasan, from Marib and their 4WD Toyota Landcruiser. They acted as drivers, helped with cooking and camp chores as well as being our armed guard. It was disconcerting at first to have their 2 kalashnikovs, shot gun and pistol in the vehicle but as everyone else appeared to be armed in eastern Yemen it soon seemed commonplace.

The geology of the survey area is limestone. A plateau of limestone (the Jol) is eroded by wadis running north and south. The wadis to the north are long and gently sloping and eventually lose themselves against the sands of the Rub al Khali. Those to the south, slope more abruptly to join the Wadi Hadramaut system. Between the two wadi systems the rocky plateau varies between only 200 m and 50 km or more wide. We did not investigate any wadi systems running south into the Wadi Hadramaut.

The weather during the survey was fine and bright each day although strong winds blew from the east and north on occasions. Not a cloud was seen during the whole period and from the various reports of local bedouin it seemed there had been no good rains in the eastern parts of the survey area for three or four years. In the western parts bulldozed water collection lagoons (known as careefs) held a little water from recent rains.

The predominant vegetation of the region was acacia (various species) which were found in all wadis, wadi outwash areas on the

northern plains (between the limestone outcrops and the sands of the Rub al Khali) and on the Jol. For the most part acacias were leafless although a few were flowering. Tamarisk and *Calotropis* was also common in the lower wadi/outwash areas. A few wadis, especially in the east, held good numbers of *Moringa* trees in the lower reaches which seemed to replace the tamarisk found in other wadis. *Maerua crassifolia* trees occurred at all levels along wadis but became especially large single trunk specimens in the heads of the wadis. *Ziziphus* trees were quite common in wadis on the plateau but occurred sparingly in others. North of Minwakh one wadi was lined with doum palms *Hyphaene thebaica*. Grasses and herbs were limited to mainly dry tufts of *Panicum* grass and 'saltbush', typical of arid regions with no recent good rains. There were very few ephemeral plants. Although camels and other livestock were widespread there was no noticeable overgrazing, except near the Oman border.

The region is poorly populated. The only settlements were at al Abr (small village of 20 houses), Zamakh (a military checkpoint), Minwakh (20-30 houses), al Bir and Hazar (military checkpoints with a few houses), Thamud and R'mah (both with about 200 houses), Shahan (former Oman village now of about 50 houses) and Fujat (40 houses). Sanau appears on most maps to be a settlement but is in fact only a well. On the plateau there are widely scattered houses and small villages, notably Salacil and as Sum'h. Apart from settled folk there are of course the bedouin and we met and visited many during the survey. These were scattered throughout the length of the wadis and out of the plains before the sands. Plains tribes met with from west to east were Sa'ar, Manahil, Kathiri and Mahra. Sections of some of the tribes seem to be more settled on the plateau, building characteristic dry stone houses and cattle byres. Bedouin in this region have a reputation for being unfriendly but we did not find this and with the exception of a couple of groups of Sa'ar, all people met with were very friendly and helpful.

It needs to be borne in mind that the ABBA surveys can only ever be a rapid assessment of a particular area because no longer than a few hours is spent in the same place and locations are never revisited. The daily routine of this survey consisted of a transect census at dawn (sunrise was approximately 0610 hrs), driving most of the morning with stops whenever desired, a lunchtime break and then driving in the afternoon until about 1700 when we set up camp. The camp stop often included an evening transect. Navigation was mainly by GPS. The route and itinerary can be seen at Fig 3. The route of Survey 20 did not cross either ABBA Survey 9 to eastern Yemen in 1989 or the 1993 OSME Survey.

Breeding activity was surprisingly late. This may have been due to the generally arid conditions, which have prevailed recently, encouraging birds to wait and chance breeding later.

In the following list details are given of selected species, both residents and visitors. Altogether 62 species were recorded between leaving Marib and returning there two weeks later. Of these, 47 were potential breeding species, ten winter visitors and only five were clearly migrants. Comments e.g. 'first record for eastern Yemen' are made against the status for birds in eastern Yemen as given in *Sandgrouse* 17:22-72.

### **Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotos***

One east of Thamud (QA11) 14 February. Two large nests in *Maerua crassifolia* trees (RA11) could have belonged to this species. Various bedouin reports were received of large tree nesting vultures.

Long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Three together MA08 and one leaving a lined but empty nest in an acacia MB08, all on 10 February.

Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

One adult north of Thamud 13 February and another adult RA11, 17 February. First records for eastern Yemen.

Arabian red-legged partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*

Recorded at five separate sites (Zamakh, RB10, RB12, and OB09). These records extend the range of this endemic north of the Wadi Hadramaut by approximately 100 km.

Houbara bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*

No birds were seen but evidence was collected of widespread, scarce breeding and regular wintering. Omar al Saghir will prepare a separate note on the information collected for this species.

Spotted thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*

One on the Jol (RB11) 17 February. Tracks belonging to a *Burhinus sp* were seen on several occasions notably in NA09 and MB09. First record for eastern Yemen.

Cream-coloured courser *Cursorius cursor*

A pair OA12, 12 February and one QB12, 19 February.

Spotted sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*

About 60 on the plain between Marib and al Abr (MB08) and another flock NA09 10 February. Other flocks thought to be this species at as Sum'h (NB09) and the plain below the plateau (NA09) 22 February. First records for eastern Yemen.

Palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Virtually absent from the study area. A few Shahan on the Oman

border 20 February, pair NB09, 20 February. Common Marib.

Streptopelia dove *Streptopelia sp*

Old *Streptopelia* dove nests seen at a number of locations. These were thought to belong to a migrant breeder, probably either *S. turtur* or *S. roseogrisea*.

Green pigeon *Treron waalia*

About a dozen feeding on *Ziziphus* fruit as Sum'h, 22 February.

Eagle owl *Bubo bubo*

One calling at dusk near Minwakh, 11 February. First record from eastern Yemen.

Little owl *Athene noctua*

Six records from widespread locations, one involved at least two birds.

Dunn's lark *Eremalanda dunni*

About 20 RA12, RB13, SA13 and SA12, 15/16 February and a pair RB12, 18 February.

Bar-tailed desert lark *Anuionianes cincturus*

One QB12 and six RA12 15 February, a total of 64 in four groups RB13, 18 February plus six QB13 and one QA13, 19 February. First records for eastern Yemen.

Short-toed lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Six OB12, 12 February. Few spring records.

Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*

One Zamakh, 11 February. First record for eastern Yemen.

Black bushchat *Cercotrichas podobe*

One Amr, 21 February and a pair at as Sum'h on the Jol. Also present Marib.

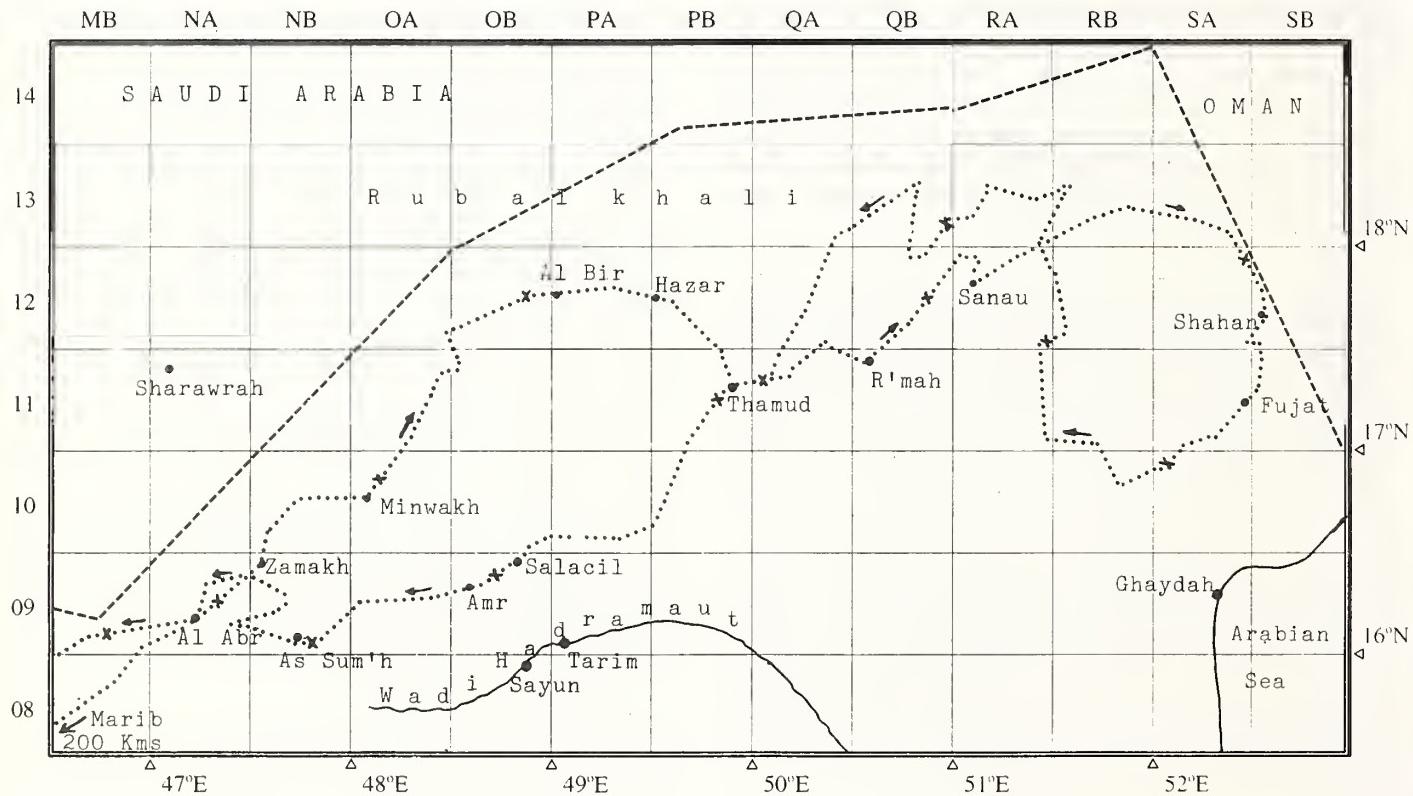


Fig 3. ABBA Survey No 20 to Eastern Yemen, February 1997. The ABBA square reference can be read from the top and left hand scales. The route taken is shown as a dotted line, crosses are camp sites. Borders are shown as a dashed line. (Key also applies to Figs 8 and 16)

#### Red-tailed wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrrhina*

One in low rocky hills QB13 19 February. First record for eastern Yemen.

#### South Arabian mourning wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides*

Singles SA10 and RA11 (16-17 February) probably represent the northern limit of the eastern population. Also on the escarpment between Sana'a and Marib.

#### Hooded wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*

Six individuals OA10, OA11, SA10, RA11, RA12 and OA09. Previously recorded as a scarce resident.

#### White-crowned black wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*

Singles Sanau and RB13, 15 and 18 February respectively. First records for eastern Yemen.

#### Arabian warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*

Widespread and apparently not uncommon at bushy areas on the Jol. A total of 18 recorded.

#### Nile valley sunbird *Anthreptes metallicus*

Widespread, often common both on the Jol and in the northern wadis. In places far into the sandy zone feeding from *Calotropis* flowers.

#### Tristram's grackle *Onychognathus tristramii*

Common RB10 and RA11 on 17 February, probably the northernmost records in the area. Also between Marib and Sana'a.

#### House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Not found Minwakh or east of R'mah.

#### African silverbill *Eudice cantans*

Flock of 30 Zamakh and a few Khashm al Barurah 11 February. (Many old nest colonies apparently of this species in OB09 and NB09 on the Jol but no birds present).

#### Trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

A pair at al Bir, 13 February.

#### House bunting *Emberiza striolata*

Only recorded at the western end of the Jol, OB09, OA09, Khashm al Barurah and as Sum'h. A group of 20 on one occasion.

In addition to the observations detailed above the following potentially breeding species were recorded in the main study area; Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, sand partridge *Amphiperdix heyi*, Lichtenstein's sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*, chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, rock dove *Columba livia*, little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, black-crowned finchlark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, desert lark *Anonomanes deserti*, hoopoe lark *Alauda alaudipes*, crested lark *Galerida cristata*, pale crag martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*, yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*, blackstart *Cercomela melanura*, graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*, scrub warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*, olivaceous warbler *Hippolais pallida*, Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*, great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor* and brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*. At Marib and nearby five other potential breeding birds were seen; cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*, black kite *Milvus migrans*, short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*, alpine swift *Apus melba* and Rüppell's weaver *Ploceus galbula*. Fan-tailed raven *Corvus rhipidurus*,

also a breeding species, was only seen at Sana'a.

Other migrants and visitors recorded were; pallid harrier *Circus pallidus*, swallow *Hirundo rustica* tawny pipit *Anthus campestris*, yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava*, white wagtail *Motacilla alba*, isabelline wheatear *Oenanthe isabellinus*, pied wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, desert wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, desert warbler *Sylvia nana*, desert lesser whitethroat *Sylvia minula* chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

From the accounts of people questioned during the survey there appear to be healthy populations of larger mammals in eastern Yemen. Although not seen, several reports of ibex suggested they are uncommon but widespread, as are gazelle. We saw three gazelle at Sanau. Other mammals recorded were red fox and hare, and tracks were seen of sand cat, wolf, hyaena and hedgehog sp.

The successful completion of ABBA Survey 20 was to my mind down to Omar who very tactfully and purposefully negotiated our passage through the region with local people. When necessary he cajoled our own men to try harder and go further. I am indebted to him for this as well as for procuring food and other supplies, the vehicle and drivers, and a host of other things that made the survey a success. My sincere thanks are also extended to David Stanton and Derek Harvey of the Yemen Ornithological Society for behind the scenes help in many ways and continuous support for the ABBA survey and project generally. Special thanks to David for his position as unofficial 'Anchor Man' in the weeks running up to survey when he dealt expeditiously with my Emails and faxes. Thanks also to him and his wife Helen for a shower, meal and facilities on return to Sana'a. Very many bedouin and settled folk of the region helped and sustained the survey in numerous ways, as is their hospitable nature, and my appreciation of this is immeasurable. The ABBA project continues to be sponsored by the NCWCD, Riyadh including publication costs but no specific grant was received from the NCWCD for this survey.

*Michael C. Jennings*

## Sites of Interest:

This column aims to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. The series of site reports appearing in the issues of *Phoenix* are not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a number of them are exceptionally good bird areas.

Observers are invited to write up other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or as large as a whole mountain range.

## Wajid Sandstones

The name Wajid Sandstones is a term used by geologists to identify the large area of sandstone outcrops that occur from just south-west of Khamasin (KA17) extending to KB12, just east of Najran and centred on the Jebel Wajid range (KA15). The whole area of approximately 250 x 100 kms is poorly known ornithologically. The Wajid Sandstones consist of many isolated sandstone rocks and large groups of outcrops forming continuous rocky areas, all of which are surrounded by open expanses of dunes and relatively flat

sandy areas. There are only one or two very small villages in this whole area and apparently no permanent water courses. I visited the area briefly in May 1991 (ABBA Survey No 10) and again in March 1996 (ABBA Survey No 19) spending a total of about eight days in the region. In the eastern part of the Wajid sandstones there are a very few straggly acacia trees but in the west there are some well wooded, deep sided wadis holding a variety of acacia and other tree species, including *Maerua* and *Zizyphus*. Parasitic *Loranthus* plants are found on the acacia. The region is very scenic and apart from its botanical and zoological attractions it has much to offer archaeologists from the point of view of the ancient rock carvings which occur commonly throughout the region. In 1996 my visit followed very good rains which meant a flush of grasses and ephemeral vegetation as well as a large number of bedouin families in the area.

Birds to be found in the area are largely typical of rocky/sandy habitats of central Arabia but there were a number of surprises. In the sandy flats and gentle dunes between and around the outcrops the regular compliment of larks occur, including black-crowned finch *Eremopterix nigriceps*, Dunn's *Eremalauda dunni*, bar-tailed *Anuonuanus cinctura* and hoopoe larks *Alaemon alaudipes*. The outcrops hold, among other species, Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*, blackstart *Cercomela melanura*, yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*, and little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, all of which are on the edge of their range in south central Arabia. African collared doves *Streptopelia semitorquata* are quite widely distributed within these sandstones. Isolated colonies of house sparrow *Passer domesticus* were found in 1996 in the remotest areas. As none were noted in 1990 this might indicate a responsiveness to vegetation change with the recent rains, or indirectly to the presence of large numbers of bedouin in 1996. Three species of wheatears appear to be resident. The hooded *Oenanthe monacha* is present locally in unusual high numbers, white crowned black wheatear *O. leucopyga* is rather scarce but widespread. Representatives of the mourning wheatear (*lugens* group) were present in March 1996, some appeared to be wintering *persicus*. Others looked very much like the race that breeds in the sandstones of northwest Arabia (but not the 1000 km in between). There were definitely no South Arabian mourning wheatear *lugentoides*, present. More needs to be done on these birds to establish their racial affinities but these records are a very interesting range extension for the species. Raptors noted were lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*, Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, eagle owl *Bubo bubo* and little owl *Athene noctua*. A plain nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus* was heard chirring at one camp site. The most interesting area of the region is probably the southwest corner where more extensive rock outcrops hold deeper, better vegetated wadis and consequently more birds. Birds found primarily in this region included Nile Valley *Anthreptes metallicus* and shining *Nectarinia habessinica* sunbirds, (new areas for both species) scrub warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*, fan-tailed raven *Corvus rhipidurus* (new area), hoopoe *Upupa epops*, calling, black bush chat *Cercotrichas podobe* and the endemic Arabian red-legged partridge, *Alectoris melanocephala* (in squares KA13 and JB14), another range extension. The most tantalising observation was a group of unidentified finch like birds. On jizz and call they resembled Sinai rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus* which, like the mourning wheatear, is found in the sandstones 1000 km to the north.



Fig 4. The pelagic red-billed tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* is rarely seen from land. Several hundred pairs nest on islands in the lower Arabian Gulf.

## Socotra: Forbes-Watson's Manuscript

To the relatively small band of researchers and ornithologists with an interest in the birds of Socotra, the apparent loss of Forbes-Watson's original report on the Smithsonian Institution-sponsored expedition to the archipelago in 1964, was much bemoaned. In subsequent reviews of the Socotran avifauna, the studies of Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993 (Dowsett, R. J. & Dowsett-Lemaire, F. 1993; *Distribution and taxonomy of Afrotropical birds*. Tauraco Research Report 5, Tauraco Press, Liège) and Kirwan *et al.* 1996 (*Sandgrouse* 17: 83–101) were forced to use a secondary source of information on the spring 1964 visit (Ripley & Bond 1996 (*Smithsonian Misc. Coll.* 151, no. 7)). Now, thanks to the diligent efforts of Mike Jennings and staff at the Smithsonian Institution, those interested in studying the birds of this little-known corner of the Indian Ocean can turn at last to Forbes-Watson's own report, almost in its entirety. (Page 17, an example of a specimen label, and pages 87–107 inclusive which present the first 21 of 42 photographs, have been lost, apparently permanently).

The Forbes-Watson manuscript contains much of interest and, for one who has had the great fortune to visit this physically remote island group, stimulates the desire to return in order to deal with the many questions which remain unanswered in respect of its birdlife. The document of 87 pages plus 42 photos provides a résumé of the expedition under a wide range of topics: including (summarised) list of photographs (amongst those now missing are photographs of Forbes-Watson's swift *Apus berliozi*, and the endemic subspecies of long-billed pipit *Anthus siuialis sokotrae* and great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor uncinatus*), maps, future work, geography, climate, exploitation, expedition transport and stores, collecting methods and specimens collected, skins, spirits, skeletons, eggs and nests, the birds of Socotra and their habitats, Palearctic migrants, Socotran endemics (original descriptions), list of birds recorded from neighbouring islands including Abd-el-Kuri, Kaal Firaon and Jazirat Sabuniya, and notes on individual species.

So, what is this document's usefulness and what light does it shed for more recent researchers into Socotra's birds? First of all, it must be said that having reviewed the manuscript for breeding records for the ABBA project database, its usefulness in this respect has to be deemed relatively insubstantial. Ripley & Bond provided reasonably full details of most breeding behaviours observed by Forbes-Watson, including his important observations on Socotra sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri*. In addition, Forbes-Watson's travels outside his base camp at Kishin in the Haggier Mountains, were extremely limited, and are in any case more easily referenced from Ripley & Bond (1966), who supplied a full itinerary, unlike the original expedition report. In this respect, the much shorter OSME expedition of spring 1993 travelled more widely and sampled a greater number of areas, albeit more superficially. A minor point is that Forbes-Watson did not examine papers published by Hartlaub 1881 (*Proc. Zool. Soc. London* 1881: 953–959), and Sclater & Hartlaub in 1881 (*Proc. Zool. Soc. London* 1881: 165–175), which were also omitted by Ripley & Bond's review. Nonetheless, the importance of the Forbes-Watson expedition and more specifically this document should not be underestimated.

Perhaps of most fascination is the fact that the manuscript provides some insights into Forbes-Watson's own thoughts and conclusions as to the taxonomic position of both the endemic *Buteo* and *Apus berliozi*, as it was subsequently described by Brooke, 1969 (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 89: 11–16). Ripley, 1966 (*L'oiseau et la Revue Francaise d'ornithologie* 35: 101–102), in his description of the new swift, considered it to be a subspecies of pallid swift *Apus pallidus*, a position which no longer enjoys much favour. Details of all of the 523 specimens collected by the expedition are provided, along with important dietary information for those selected species (including all of the endemics) discussed in the main body of the manuscript. For some key species, e.g. Socotra bunting *Emberiza socotrana*, the information provided in the Forbes-Watson manuscript is significantly more detailed than that furnished in the Ripley & Bond summary (although it should be stated that in many cases the latter is quite sufficient as a reference vehicle). The reasons for the lack of records of Palearctic–African migrants receives attention; *Motacilla alba forwoodi*, described by Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes from Abd Al-Kuri, is considered probably to have related to migrants rather than a resident population; and there is valuable and occasionally enlightening discussion of a number of records, made by Hunter, Reg Moreau and others on Socotra or at sea nearby, which have not been accorded recognition in the subsequent literature on the islands' birds. On a personal note, it is fascinating to compare one's own experiences of the Socotran avifauna and way-of-life, with those of Forbes-Watson and his two Kenyan taxidermists. In many respects, comparatively little appears to have changed.

Finally, it must be stated that much of the future work outlined by Forbes-Watson remains in need of completion, and would be of value to the final Atlas. Enigmas, such as whether Jouanin's petrel *Bulweria fallax*, found commonly in the seas off Socotra during the spring 1993 survey, breeds in the archipelago; the true status of the endemic subspecies of Nubian nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus jonesi* (known with certainty only from the type-specimen, although Forbes-Watson did record an unidentified nightjar south of Suk in late March 1964, a fact not mentioned by Ripley & Bond); and the continuing taxonomic problems posed by Forbes-Watson's swift and the endemic *Buteo*. In addition, due to a complete lack of survey work during the main breeding season of most resident species, considered to be at the end of the year and coinciding with the rains, much remains unknown about the life-histories of the endemic taxa. Even now, the two small islands, known as the

Brothers, which may be important for nesting seabirds, remain unvisited by ornithologists, as do the south-western highlands of Socotra island. Hopefully, the recently announced decision of the Darwin Initiative to award £158,000 to further research into Socotra's biodiversity will allow a number of mysteries to be solved.

*Guy M Kirwan, 55 West End Street, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 5BP.*

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## African Spoonbill and Sacred Ibis do Strange Things in Yemen

Neither the African spoonbill nor the sacred ibis have been known to breed in Arabia, but both could. The following article concerning some extraordinary behaviour by these species noted by David Stanton is repeated from *Lammergeier* 11 (the newsletter of the Yemen Ornithological Society), March 1997.

"During his recent visit, Richard Porter was excited to find both African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* and Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* at the Aden Marshes for the second consecutive year. Although numerous in Africa, both of these birds are considered vagrant to Yemen. In fact, this represents only the second substantiated report of African Spoonbill from the Arabian peninsula. The presence of two adult spoonbills, and eight ibis (including four juveniles), indicates that these birds might actually be resident in small numbers.

Seeing these rare waterbirds was high on Derek Harvey's list when we visited the marshes on the morning of 9 February. It was with great joy that we spotted 2 adult African Spoonbills perched on a dead shrub on an islet in the marsh. Foraging on the island were several juvenile Sacred Ibis. As we watched, one of the spoonbills started manipulating a length of straw. When I pointed this out to Derek, he noticed that the spoonbills were actually standing on a platform that they had apparently constructed from the same material. At about that time, I noticed that one of the ibises was also picking up pieces of straw.

As we watched, the ibis jumped up on the platform and started adding to it. The spoonbills left and the ibis continued building the platform (nest?). By 10.00 am when we finally left, the spoonbills had resumed possession of the growing construction. They engaged in mutual preening and billing and seemed every inch the happy young couple. At no time did we

observe any interaction between the two species. The spoonbills and ibises completely ignored one another throughout the peculiar goings-on.

When I returned to the marsh in the late afternoon, 2 of the ibises were on the "nest", and the remaining six were in the vicinity of the islet. The spoonbills were nowhere in sight. The following morning the islet was uninhabited.

As the islet is approached daily by local people tending their sheep and cattle, it seems virtually impossible that either the ibises or the spoonbills could successfully rear a brood on the platform. It is interesting, however, that two species of birds hitherto considered vagrant in southern Yemen, should be seen exhibiting "probable breeding" behaviour (Breeding Evidence Codes: 3, 5, 9) in such an intimate manner."

**Postscript:** David Stanton and Oman al Saghir visited the Aden Marshes again on 5 & 6 June and saw an adult African spoonbill and two juvenile sacred ibis there. There were no further reports of these species indulging in breeding activities.

## New Books:

*Phoenix* aims to give details of all new publications which are relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia, or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned.

Alternatively, all the titles reviewed in this and earlier issues of *Phoenix* may be ordered through Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd, Treuddyn, Nr Mold, Clwyd, North Wales, CH7 4LN, UK. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new, relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

### **Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East by Derek A Scott (Ed) 1995**

With an increasing demand for water throughout the Middle Eastern region for agricultural, urban and industrial uses there is a corresponding increase in the pressure put upon the small numbers of wetland habitats in the region. It is not surprising that major irrigation schemes and population growths are the major causes of wetland loss in recent years. This report has been commissioned by a number of international conservation bodies as an aid to decision making by government and non-government planners. It sets out the consequences of wetland loss and the efforts that are needed to achieve sustainable use of resources. This report will be an important baseline for monitoring of wetland habitats in the Middle East for decades and hopefully will lead to a wiser use of wetlands in future. With only a few pages of introduction the body of the book is a systematic treatment of the Middle East state by state, working through a list of sites for each nation. For each country there is a general location map showing the position of sites and an introduction covering area, population, and other general

information. Then follows a summary of the wetland situation generally in that country with research and legislation activities as well as the organisations involved in wetland conservation. For each site information is given on the general locality, area, altitude, physical and ecological features, land tenure, conservation measures taken and proposed, land use and changes in land use, disturbance and threats, social and cultural values of the site and notes on important flora and fauna. A total of 92 sites are dealt with in detail for Arabia including 30 in Saudi Arabia and 24 in the United Arab Emirates.

*Card Covers, 560 pages (160 x 214 mm). Price £45.00, excl. p&p. Published by the IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. Available from IWRB, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7DX, UK. ISBN 2-8317-0270-4.*

### **Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 3: Hoatzin to Auks (1997)**

If books were judged by weight this one at 4.1 kg (9 lb) would certainly come out on top. However it also succeeds when judged by various more traditional bird book standards. It is a good read, a competent reference, contains good quality photographs to a high standard of reproduction and has expertly prepared colour illustrations. This is the 3rd volume of the series which will probably run to nine or ten volumes eventually, covering all the birds of the world. This volume covers the single species opisthoicomiformes (hoatzin), the gruiformes including cranes, rails and bustards, and the charadriiformes, that is waders, gulls and terns. The series has settled into a consistent format whereby birds are dealt with at two levels, at the family level and at the species level. At the family level treatment, for example of the sternidae (terns), covers the general aspects of species including systematics, ornithological aspects, habitat, general habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationships with man, and status and conservation. A box at the beginning of the family provides outline world range map for the family, size range, general habitat, the number of genera, species and taxa (total subspecies recognised), for terns this is 10, 44 and 123 respectively. There is also a conservation line highlighting the number of species threatened or extinct since 1600. Five species of terns are threatened but none have recently become extinct. The family sections are illustrated with some stunning photographs of birds engaged in typical activities for the genus such as feeding methods, flocking, nesting, mating etc. Each photo has a very full descriptive caption which compels even the most hurried of browsers to linger. The species accounts provide birds names in French, German and Spanish and deal with each species against the sub-headings of taxonomy, sub-species and distribution, descriptive notes, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements and status and conservation. An abbreviated bibliography appears at the end of each species account and cross-refers to the full bibliography in each volume. Within each family all species are numbered and the numbers cross-refer to the nearby colour artwork illustrating each species. Species accounts also have a world range map showing breeding and non-breeding range. These maps change format according to size of range and are quite ample. The species account generally answers most questions the average reader/researcher will need however they are not as lengthy as those in *BWP*. Rightly or wrongly everyone tends to judge bird books on the quality of the artwork and *HBW* comes out very well in this respect. Each species is illustrated at least once and sometimes several illustrations appear to show sex/race variations. Volume 3 is illustrated by a top class international team. *HBW*

presents information on every species in the world and an illustration of each species. The text accounts are very readable and in a straightforward unstuffy style which is quite unlike many of the more traditional handbooks that have recently appeared or are in production at present. This volume has a high degree of Arabian relevance, of the 547 species dealt with a quick count suggests 124 have occurred in Arabia and of these about 35 have bred. It is expensive but so are so many good bird books. Recommended.

*Hardback, 824 pages (240 x 310 mm) includes 60 colour plates, 384 photographs and 577 maps. Price £105, published by Lynx Edicions, Passeig de gracia 12, Barcelona, Spain. ISBN 84-87334-20-2.*

### **Desert Ecology of Abu Dhabi by P E Osborne (1996)**

Subtitled "A review and recent studies" this book ties together all recent important work on the study of Abu Dhabi's flora and fauna. It is an inherently attractive book with many excellent colour photographs of animals, plants and habitats, each with a full caption which many would regard as a good read on their own. Beyond the captions it presents technical information about the ecology and bio-diversity of Abu Dhabi, the largest emirate in the UAE. It is a review of what is known of the country's wildlife and ecology. It is divided into nine major chapters dealing separately with, for example, geology, climate, vegetation, birds, terrestrial reptiles, mammals and arthropods. The book is a project of the National Avian Research Centre, Abu Dhabi and not surprisingly has two whole chapters relating to the houbara. One concerns restoring houbara habitats and the other covers the status and occurrence of the species in Arabia and Abu Dhabi. The birds chapter flows over 25 pages and includes ecological analysis of the desert birds of Abu Dhabi including detailed notes of desert frequenting species, partly based on an extensive series of transect surveys. Thirty three species are dealt with individually and include some migrants and winter visitors but all are typical of the Abu Dhabi desert. Within the bird section there are ten maps, two text figures, eight tables and 13 colour plates. Appendices include a glossary of terms (useful for the non-technical reader), a bibliography of 3-400 references and a list of Abu Dhabi birds and their status.

*Hard back, 248 pages (200 x 300 mm). Price 120 Dhrms (£25 or US\$40, all prices include postage) and available from ERWDA - see below. Published by Pisces Publications, 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Road, Newbury, Berks RG14 5SJ, UK. Available from ERWDA, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, ISBN 1-874357-05-6.*

### **Natural Emirates: Wildlife and Environment of the UAE by P J Vine (Ed) (1996)**

This book is a celebration of the variety of the UAE natural habitats and wildlife. An introduction detailing the study of wildlife and the environment and the collection of knowledge of Emirates natural history of the last 200 years is followed by chapters on geology, the fossil record and habitat protection. Apparently the Emirates was the home to hippos and crocodiles in the not too geological past. The introduction highlights the increasingly fast changes affecting the UAE environment which in recent years has seen the loss of much pristine desert. In other places artificial habitat is being created on a grand scale, for example on Sir Bani Yas Island a

previously barren desert island there is now a verdant irrigated park with landscaped gardens and a vast range of exotic animals. The main body of the book comprises chapters on each of animal groups e.g. insects, birds, mammals etc. The group accounts are variable in approach, for some taxa information is organised in scientific order but others are a simple narrative. However the whole holds together as a generally well thought out introduction to UAE wildlife. The bird chapter of 17 pages is mainly a narrative of what birds are to be found in different habitat types, there is also a checklist of common birds and their status. The book is illustrated throughout by very many colour photographs and a few line drawings.

*Hard back, 248 pages (195 x 250 mm). Price not known, available from Trident Press, 2-5 Old Bond Street, London, W1X 3TB. ISBN 1-900724-02-2. There is also an Arabic edition.*



**Fig 5.** The grey hornbill *Tockus nasutus* is an African species extending into the Tihama and foothills of south-west Arabia. During incubation the male walls the female up in a nest chamber which is a tree hole or a rock crevice, leaving only a small slit to feed her through.

### **A Marine Wildlife Sanctuary for the Arabian Gulf by F Krupp, A H Abuzinada and I A Nader (Eds) 1996**

The subtitle of this book is Environmental Research and Conservation following the 1991 Gulf War Oil spill which is a better description of the contents. After the 1991 Gulf War, the European Commission, in partnership with the NCWCD, undertook detailed multi-disciplinary marine and coastal studies between Kuwait and Bahrain. The project has culminated in the first ever marine habitat and wildlife sanctuary in the Arabian Gulf region. This book presents 30 scientific papers as a summary of the research so far, which has generated well over 100 other separate papers. These papers range from clean-up techniques used in dealing with the oil spill to the role of education in marine sanctuary management. There are many significant papers on flora and fauna of the Arabian Gulf marine environment including three

on birds. These cover the ornithological importance of the Jubail Marine Wildlife Sanctuary, the status of Socotra cormorant after the 1991 war and the breeding population of terns after the war. Illustrations in colour of fauna, flora and habitats appear throughout and there is a map insert on the back page.

*Hard cover, 511 pages (210 x 285 mm). Cost DM 120; jointly published and available from the NCWCD, PO Box 61681, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and the Senckenberg Institute, Senckenbergenanlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany. ISBN 9960-614-03-4.*

### **The Living Marine Resources of Kuwait, Eastern Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates by K E Carpenter, F Krupp, D A Jones and U Zajouz (1997)**

This field guide has been prepared as a tool for ecological and biodiversity studies in the Arabian Gulf. It is a directory of plants, crustaceans, molluscs, sea snakes, sea turtles, seabirds and marine mammals occurring in the region. The introduction deals with the physical and chemical characteristics of the Arabian Gulf, climate, currents, biological aspects and its fisheries. Each section has general introductory notes, for example covering technical terms, as well as an illustrated guide to the higher taxonomic groups. The details at species level include notes on nomenclature where appropriate, English and Arabic names, size data, diagnostic features and information on habitat and biology, as well as fisheries and the economic or environmental/conervation importance of each species. Hundreds and hundreds of good quality line drawings to assist identification as well as 17 colour plates, illustrating 122 species of fish. Fully indexed and referenced. Recommended.

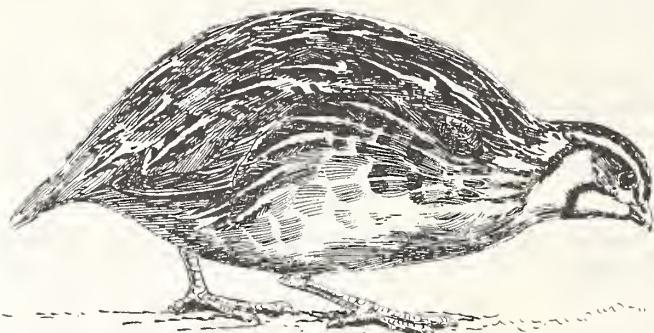
*Card covers, 318 pages, (170 X 240 mm). Price \$47. Published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN and prepared with the support of the Saudi Fisheries Company and the EEC. Available from the Sales and Marketing FAO/UN, Via Delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy. ISSN 1020-4547, ISBN 92-5-103741-8.*

### **Bahrain Sea Shells by Stephen Green (1994)**

This is an introductory guide to increase awareness of the 161 species of shells recorded by the author in Bahrain. Bahrain has had an association with the sea over many thousands of years. Archaeological digs have found seals made of shell over 4000 years old. In recent centuries Bahrain was a major pearl fishing centre. Shells from three classes are included in this guide; tusk shells, gastropods (those shells that form a cone) and bi-valves (two piece shells like oysters and mussels). The shells are arranged into species accounts which show the family, species name including the author and year it was described, a short description which includes the size (length and width) and information on where the shells have been or can be found, including a small map indicating collection localities. Each species account is illustrated by a very attractive colour photograph depicting one or more examples of the shell against an attractive vegetation, rock or wooden background bringing out its colours and texture. The colour photographs by Nazem Chouhfeh are all artistically set.

*Hard cover, 182 pages (210 x 305mm). It is understood that this*

*book is no longer available for sale; further enquiries to the author c/o PO Box 10264, Manama, Bahrain.*



**Fig 6 .** The quail *Coturnix coturnix* has been able to colonise much of northern and eastern Arabia because of recent changes in agricultural practice. Irrigated fields, especially hay crops make ideal nesting habitat for it.

### **Shikra Breeding in the United Arab Emirates**

The shikra *Accipiter badius* was not recorded in the UAE until 1996, although the likelihood of its occurrence had been confidently predicted by Richardson & Bannon (1991) in a list of potential new bird species for the UAE (*Tribulus* 1(1):9-13). The species has a disjointed old world range. One population occurs in sub Saharan Africa and south-west Arabia; with another across northern Iran, much of India and south-east Asia. In winter, birds from the Asian population certainly disperse, reaching areas outside of the known breeding range, south-east Iran for example, but they do not undergo a migration in the manner of some other *Accipiter* species, Levant sparrowhawk *A. brevipes*, Japanese sparrowhawk *A. gularis* or even European sparrowhawk *A. nisus* for example.

The first UAE record was of a single bird seen by J & E Djerf, at Zabeel, Dubai on 9 April 1996, although by the time this observation had been reported two birds had been seen engaged in a lengthy sky-diving display at this same locality on 27 June and thereafter by myself & C Richardson. One bird, an adult and probably a male, and another a sub-adult and female, were seen regularly from that date for two weeks and then more intermittently until 18 October (K Hyland and Richardson *pers. comn.*). A moulting immature at Safa Park some 5 km away, on 8 August was assumed to be one of these birds.

Although occasional winter records might have been expected in the UAE, the spring, summer and early autumn records all pointed instead to oversummering. Even breeding had to be a possibility, notwithstanding one of the birds being immature plumaged. The large wooded gardens and parklands in and around Zabeel and Safa Park/Jumeirah would present ideal conditions for shikra, with a ready abundance of prey, and the cover afforded by widespread *Casuarina* which would provide perfect concealment for a nest.

No more birds were seen until 18 March 1997 when a single adult was seen by J K Bannon at Zabeel once more. The possibility of

breeding in the grounds of Zabeel Palace seemed very real. No further 1997 sightings were made until a juvenile was seen at Safa Park on 17 July, with another observation, again of a juvenile bird, three kilometres away in Jumeirah five days later. The strongly marked underparts; broadly lined breast breaking up into large dark brown spots on the lower breast and belly and dark barred tail, marking this bird as a juvenile, apart from the pristine condition of the plumage. The upperparts were dull darkish brown. Unfortunately no adults were seen in the midsummer period but the presence of a juvenile certainly indicates that shikra had nested for the first time in the UAE. Lack of observers and the torrid weather discourage or reduce fieldwork progressively from April onwards so it is probably not too surprising that a secretive nester like the shikra would not be detected.

Dubai is some 1000 km from the nearest known breeding area in Iran and, although not proven, the Dubai birds appeared to be attributable to the Iranian race *cenchroides*; those in south-west Arabia (race *sphenurus*), some 1400 km distant, possessing a distinctly different plumage. The main differences being the more distinctively contrasting black wingtip, bluer grey upperparts and lack of buff on the hind neck on *sphenurus*; *cenchroides* is also slightly larger. Another contender would be those breeding in Pakistan (race *dussumieri*); at closest these are 1100-1200 km distant. However this latter source is considered less likely on the basis of the known dispersal patterns and on the regional geography and weather.

It is interesting that the files of the Emirates Bird Records Committee contain a record on 12 March 1992 of an adult accipiter sky-diving in the area of Saqr Park in Ras al Khaimah (J K Bannon). This, with the benefit of hindsight, may also refer to shikra rather than European sparrowhawk. Perhaps a small founder population of this diminutive hawk is getting started in the UAE. There is no doubt that the planting of woodlands and creation of irrigated parkland and gardens in the UAE in the last two decades has created conditions very favourable for a small woodland raptor to occupy. Shikra would obviously be a front-runner to fill this vacant niche.

*Simon Aspinall, PO Box 791, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

## ABBA and *Phoenix* Notes and Notices

### Records still needed

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, are urged to make contact with the Coordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. For example were there house sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Abu Dhabi in 1960? No one seems to know for sure. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly unusual breeding species are also very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed. There is still much scope for collecting breeding bird information even for the common species in well trodden areas. Would observers please continue to send in records and information for their local area and remember to copy ABBA report sheets to the local bird recorder (if there is one). Any outstanding report sheets for 1997 should be

sent in as soon as possible. All potential contributors will be sent full instructions on how to submit records, ABBA recording forms, breeding birds list etc.

### How to obtain *Phoenix*

One issue of *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is also available on subscription for a single payment of £20 for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 15 to 19 inclusive. Because of the excessive bank charges for handling foreign cheques those not having access to a UK bank account are asked to pay in sterling notes or the equivalent in foreign currency notes. *Phoenix* Nos 1-13 are available at £2 each (or the set for £18) including postage. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. All subscribers will receive a reminder when their next subscription is due. Will subscribers and observers please remember to advise any change of address.



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### Photos needed for *Phoenix*

Photos of Arabian breeding birds, their nests, eggs and habitats etc are welcomed for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Submitted photos may be in colour or black and white (glossy or matt), slides, prints or negatives, so long as they have good contrast.

## Contributions to *Phoenix*

Articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. There is no charge for notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports, publications etc. Articles may be submitted on disk (please state software) typed or handwritten. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

## The *Phoenix*

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## ABBA Survey Reports and Summaries

To date, 22 ABBA Surveys have been completed, they have reached almost every part of Arabia from the Gulf of Aqaba to Ras al Hadd in Oman and the Kuwait border to Aden. For each survey a summary report is prepared which includes the itinerary, a map and details of unusual observations etc. This is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, the summaries and full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition, a small number are available for sale. Full reports of Surveys Nos 4 to 16, and summaries of all 22 are currently available. (See details on pages 17 and 18).

## List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

An updated list of all the birds which breed, have bred at least once or are highly likely to breed but not yet proven, has been prepared for the use of ABBA contributors. The list which provides brief details of status in Arabia and a summary of breeding distribution is an essential reference for ABBA contributors as it is the key list of species codes (ABBA Form 2). The list is reproduced in the centre pages of this issue of *Phoenix*.

## Journals, Reports and Other Publications

The following notes list some of the more interesting papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in the various Arabian natural history society newsletters and in other reports etc in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the main papers listed most periodicals also include regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc.

## *Journal Saudi Arabian Natural History Society* Volume 3 (6)

The Society appears to have been having problems in producing its

journal in recent years, this issue is dated a year earlier than volume 3 (5). It is a slim volume containing four articles concerning Arabian horses, plants of the Jebel Qahar and Lejib gorge, date cultivation and marine turtles of the Arabian Gulf.

## *Tribulus* issues 6:2 and 7:1

These issues appeared in October 1996 and Spring 1997 respectively. The first included an index to Volumes 1-5 (1991-1995). There are a dozen or so main articles in these two latest issues predominantly concerning the archeology of the UAE although notes on insects and invertebrates also figure prominently. 'Records round ups' of notable bird reports appear in each issue, highlighting the incredible variety of birds passing through and visiting the UAE. The main ornithological interest in issue 6:2 is the publication of a red data list of UAE birds. Birds occurring in the UAE have been categorised according to generally recognised international conservation priorities. There are eight categories on the list; globally threatened, small world range, threatened in Arabia, threatened in UAE, rare UAE breeder, important rare birds of the UAE, non-threatened species and pioneer species (those that have recently established a breeding foothold in the UAE). For the first four categories each species is identified as vulnerable and/or declining in the UAE. This is a valuable tool in directing the attention of governments and non-government organisations to those species that are most at risk. It is also a baseline for future conservation priorities.

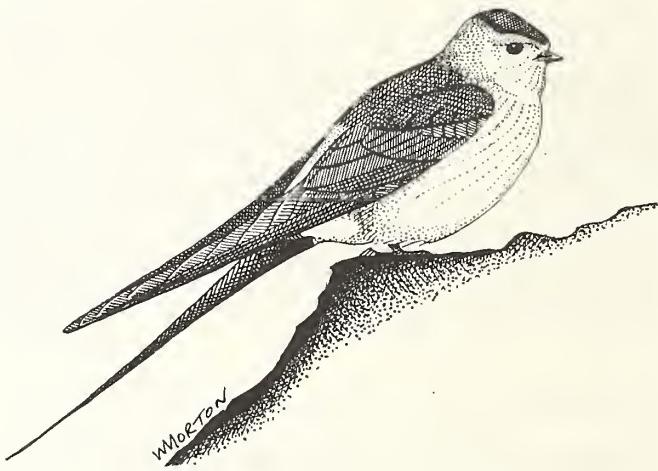


Fig 7. Up to five pairs of red-rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica* bred each year 1994-6 by the al Hair water course south of Riyadh (MB25/6). Nests have been found under bridges and rock overhangs and in concrete buildings (D James).

## *The Lammergeier*

The Yemen Ornithological Society has produced its newsletter *The Lammergeier* almost every month this year and they have included a wide range of interesting reports, unusual records, site avifaunas, and identification notes. Details of the YOS newsletter and of membership are available from the Secretary, David B Stanton, Yemen Ornithological Society, PO Box 2002, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. Telephone number 9671248309, fax 9671234438. (Email david.s@netqsi.com)

## *Emirates Bird Report* 19 (1997)

This issue was delayed a few months but its 136 pages (A5 size)

## LIST OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

The species listed here are those known to have bred in Arabia or are very likely to breed. The order and scientific nomenclature follows the *List of recent Holarctic bird species* by K. H. Voous (published by the British Ornithologists' Union, 1977). The reference number shown on the left is the number to be inserted in Column 2 of the ABBA Report sheet Form 3. Those few species not on the Voous list are given a separate sequence commencing with 2001.

The Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) used by the ABBA project should be read in conjunction with this list. Details of species additional to the list, for which breeding is proven (BEC 10 or higher), will be published in future issues of *Phoenix*. Observers suspecting or proving breeding of species not shown on the list should make a full report. Highly sedentary species are identified with an asterisk (\*). Because presence of these species, even outside the breeding season, is a good indication of local breeding, BEC "XX" may be used to report occurrence in suitable habitat at any time. Atlassers should be aware that many species which breed also occur as visitors. Because of the possibility of confusion with migrants certain BEC's are irrelevant for a number of species, for example Codes 00 and 01 for the Hoopoe *Upupa epops*. This is because a Hoopoe can appear anywhere in Arabia as a migrant during the breeding season. BEC 03 should also be suspect because two birds associating together may be migrants or a breeding pair. Observers should also be aware that the breeding season of a species may vary in different parts of the peninsula, according to altitude or recent rainfall. Summary details of the breeding biology, distribution etc for each species can be found in 'An Interim Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia' published by NCWCD Riyadh (1995).

**0007 *Tachybaptus ruficollis* LITTLE GREBE** Migrant and winter visitor. Opportunist breeder in fresh water habitats.

**0012 *Podiceps nigricollis* BLACK-NECKED GREBE** Winter visitor and opportunistic breeder in fresh water habitats. A pelagic species.

**0035 *Bulweria fallax* JOUANIN'S PETREL** Breeding areas unknown. Circumstantial evidence suggests it may nest in the coastal deserts of southern Arabia.

**0049 *Puffinus lherminieri* PERSIAN SHEARWATER** Occurs off coasts of southern Arabia. Has bred Kuria Muria Islands.

**0064 *Phaethon aethereus* RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD** Breeds islands and coastal cliffs southern Arabian Gulf. the Gulfs of Oman and Aden and the Red Sea.

**0068 *Sula dactylatra* MASKED BOOBY** Breeds on islands of southern Oman and Red Sea.

**0070 *Sula leucogaster* BROWN BOOBY** Breeds Red Sea islands. Seen along whole length of Red Sea and eastwards to Dhofar.

**0081 *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* SOCOTRA CORMORANT** Main breeding islands are in the Arabian Gulf, but also occurs Gulfs of Oman and Aden, rarely southern Red Sea.

**0088 *Pelecanus onocrotalus* WHITE PELICAN** Winter visitor. One old breeding record from Kuwait.

**0090 *Pelecanus rufescens* PINK-BACKED PELICAN**

Breeds islands of southern Red Sea. Observed whole of Red Sea and shores of eastern Yemen.

**0098 *Ixobrychus minutus* LITTLE BITTERN** A migrant which also occasionally breeds.

**0104 *Nycticorax nycticorax* NIGHT HERON** Migrant and winter visitor. Has bred Dubai and Riyadh.

**0107 *Butorides striatus* LITTLE GREEN HERON** Resident all coasts except the northern Arabian Gulf.

**0108 *Ardeola ralloides* SQUACCO HERON** Has bred Riyadh.

**0111 *Bubulcus ibis* CATTLE EGRET** Resident south west coastlands. Migrant elsewhere. Has attempted to breed at Riyadh.

**0118 *Egretta gularis* WESTERN REEF HERON** Breeds all coasts.

**0124 *Ardea purpurea* PURPLE HERON** Has bred southern Red Sea and central Arabia but the majority of all records are of migrants.

**0125 *Ardea goliath* GOLIATH HERON** Straggles to all coasts, breeds southern Red Sea.

**0126 *Scopus umbretta* HAMERKOP** Resident freshwater habitats in south west.

**0132 *Ciconia abdimii* ABDIM'S STORK** Breeding summer visitor to Yemen.

**0144 *Platalea leucorodia* SPOONBILL** Scarce migrant to most coastal areas resident and breeds Red Sea coast.

**0147 *Phoenicopterus ruber* GREATER FLAMINGO** Common widespread visitor which has bred Kuwait, Dubai and possibly Red Sea coast.

**0148 *Phoenicopterus minor* LESSER FLAMINGO** Erratic occurrence coasts of southern Arabia where has built nesting mounds.

**0170 *Alopochen aegyptiacus* EGYPTIAN GOOSE** Introduced and now established as a resident on the UAE coast, especially in areas of mangroves.

**0171 *Tadorna ferruginea* RUDDY SHELDUCK** Erratic occurrence; has bred eastern Saudi Arabia.

**0186 *Anas platyrhynchos* MALLARD** Migrant. Also resident at a few sites in Saudi Arabia and UAE.

**0194 *Anas clypeata* SHOVELLER** Common visitor. Has bred eastern Saudi Arabia.

**0202 *Aythya nyroca* FERRUGINOUS DUCK** A migrant and winter visitor that has bred in Saudi Arabia and Oatar.

**0235 *Elanus caeruleus* BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE** Rare visitor (possibly residents) to south west where it has bred. Vagrant other areas.

**0238 *Milvus migrans* BLACK KITE** Migrant all areas. Resident population in the south west from Jeddah to Dhofar.

**0246 *Gypaetus barbatus* BEARDED VULTURE** Resident in western highlands. Decreasing and now rare in Saudi Arabia.

**0247 *Neophron percnopterus* EGYPTIAN VULTURE** Widespread resident except northern Arabia.

**0251 *Gyps fulvus* GRIFFON VULTURE** Widespread except the north east where only a straggler. Not known to breed in Oman and UAE.

**0254 *Torgos tracheliotos* LAPPET-FACED VULTURE** Widespread breeding in central plains and northern Oman/UAE. Absent western highlands.

**0256 *Circaetus gallicus* SHORT-TOED EAGLE** Mainly a migrant and visitor, but breeds occasionally.

**0257 *Terathopius ecaudatus* BATELEUR** Resident in south west.

**0265 *Melierax metabates* DARK CHANTING GOSHAWK** Resident in south west.

**0266 *Micronisus gabar* GABAR GOSHAWK** Resident in south west.

**0272 *Accipiter badius* SHIKRA** Resident in south west. Scarce visitor (breeding?) to UAE.

**0288 *Buteo rufinus* LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD** Widespread but uncommon resident.

**2034 *Buteo buteo/tachardus* SOCOTRA BUZZARD** Resident Socotra. Taxonomic status unclear.

**0294 *Aquila rapax* TAWNY EAGLE** Resident in south west.

**0296 *Aquila chrysaetos* GOLDEN EAGLE** Widespread but uncommon resident. central plains and Oman.

**0297 *Aquila verreauxii* VERREAU'S EAGLE** Scarce resident, highlands of Dhofar, southern and western Arabia.

**0299 *Hieraetus fasciatus* BONELLI'S EAGLE** Scarce but widespread resident.

**0301 *Pandion haliaetus* OSPREY** Breeds islands, all coasts, also a migrant, including inland.

**0303 *Falco naumanni* LESSER KESTREL** Has bred once in northern Saudi Arabia, also a migrant.

**0304 *Falco tinnunculus* KESTREL** Widespread breeding bird but also common migrant and winter visitor.

**0312 *Falco concolor* SOOTY FALCON** Breeding summer visitor to islands of the Red Sea, southern Arabia and southern Arabian Gulf. One inland breeding record.

**0314 *Falco biarmicus* LANNER** Widespread but rare and apparently decreasing.

**0320 *Falco peregrinus* PEREGRINE** Migrant, breeding status needs confirmation.

**0321 *Falco pelegrinoides* BARBARY FALCON** Widespread resident.

**0355 *Alectoris chukar* \* CHUKAR** Highlands of the extreme north west and Musandam and UAE. Also introduced Abu Dhabi islands.

**0360 *Alectoris philbyi* \* PHILBY'S CHUKAR** South western highlands.

**0361 *Alectoris melanocephala* \* ARABIAN RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE** Western highlands, eastern Yemen, Dhofar and northern Oman.

0362 <i>Ammoperdix griseogularis</i> SEE SEE PARTRIDGE Introduced Sir Bani Yas island, UAE.	0477 <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> KENTISH PLOVER Breeds all coasts and inland freshwater sites, also common migrant.	Arabia. Has bred.
0363 <i>Ammoperdix heyi*</i> SAND PARTRIDGE Widespread except in north east.	0487 <i>Hoplopterus spinosus</i> SPUR-WINGED PLOVER Disjointed breeding range in the west. Rare visitor elsewhere.	0665 <i>Columba livia</i> ROCK DOVE Widespread. Confusable with feral pigeons. (The code for feral pigeons is 2032).
0364 <i>Francolinus francolinus*</i> BLACK FRANCOLIN Introduced UAE coastlands.	0490 <i>Hoplopterus indicus</i> RED-WATTLED PLOVER Resident UAE and Oman. Vagrant other parts of eastern Arabia.	0670 <i>Columba palumbus</i> WOOD PIGEON Resident Oman highlands, scarce northern and eastern Arabia.
0365 <i>Francolinus pondicerianus*</i> GREY FRANCOLIN Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Northern Oman. Extending northwards.	0492 <i>Chettusia leucura</i> WHITE-TAILED PLOVER Has bred eastern Saudi Arabia and UAE wetlands. Otherwise widespread. Scarce migrant.	2009 <i>Columba arquatrix</i> OLIVE PIGEON Breeding locally in south west highlands.
0370 <i>Coturnix coturnix</i> COMMON QUAIL Uncommon and local breeding bird, also widespread common migrant.	0571 <i>Larus hemprichii</i> SOOTY GULL Red Sea southern Arabian and southern Arabian Gulf.	0683 <i>Streptopelia roseogrisea</i> AFRICAN COLLARED DOVE Western and south western Arabia.
2001 <i>Coturnix delegorguei</i> HARLEQUIN QUAIL Erratic occurrence in south west coastlands. Breeding very likely but status needs confirmation.	0572 <i>Larus leucocephalus</i> WHITE-EYED GULL Red Sea and coast of south west Arabia.	0684 <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE Range expanding towards south west.
2035 <i>Pavo cristatus</i> COMMON PEAFOWL Has bred in semi protected situations, e.g. Sir Bani Yas island UAE.	0605 <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i> GULL-BILLED TERN Occurs all coasts and inland, mainly winter and spring. Has bred.	0685 <i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i> RED-EYED DOVE Local in south west.
0398 <i>Numida meleagris*</i> HELMETED GUINEAFOWL Lowlands of south west Arabia. Decreasing and threatened.	0606 <i>Sterna caspia</i> CASPIAN TERN Widespread breeding sometimes colonially.	0687 <i>Streptopelia tutur</i> TURTLE DOVE Common migrant and widespread breeding bird.
0400 <i>Turnix sylvatica</i> LITTLE BUTTON QUAIL Very few records, south west lowlands. Likely to be sedentary.	0608 <i>Sterna bergii</i> SWIFT TERN Breeding summer visitor, all coasts; probably some resident southern Red Sea.	0688 <i>Streptopelia lugens</i> DUSKY TURTLE DOVE Highlands of south west.
0407 <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> WATER RAIL Migrant and winter visitor, breeds sparingly.	0609 <i>Sterna bengalensis</i> LESSER CRESTED TERN Breeding summer visitor.	0690 <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> PALM DOVE Common and widespread.
0410 <i>Porzana parva</i> LITTLE CRAKE Widespread, scarce migrant. Has bred northern Arabia.	0611 <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> SANDWICH TERN Widespread migrant and visitor, has bred northern Gulf.	0692 <i>Oena capensis</i> NAMAQUA DOVE Widespread and erratic occurrence and breeding.
0424 <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> MOORHEN Opportunistic breeder in freshwater habitats, also a migrant and winter visitor.	0614 <i>Sterna dougallii</i> ROSEATE TERN Scarce summer visitor, breeds Oman.	0703 <i>Treron waalia</i> BRUCE'S GREEN PIGEON Summer visitor to south west and Dhofar.
0427 <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i> PURPLE GALLINULE Has bred Kuwait. Vagrant elsewhere.	0620 <i>Sterna repressa</i> WHITE-CHEEKED TERN Breeding summer visitor.	0712 <i>Psittacula krameri</i> ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET Introduced exotic, established in most large towns where resident.
0429 <i>Fulica atra</i> COOT Opportunistic breeder in open freshwater habitats. Also winter visitor.	0622 <i>Sterna anaethetus</i> BRIDLED TERN Breeding summer visitor.	2024 <i>Psittacula eupatria</i> ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET Introduced exotic, present Bahrain, UAE.
0444 <i>Chlamydota undulata</i> HOUBARA Winter visitor to mainly eastern Arabia, breeds in small numbers northern Saudi Arabia, southern Oman and eastern Yemen. Reintroduced central Saudi Arabia.	0623 <i>Sterna fuscata</i> SOOTY TERN Has bred Oman. Scarce visitor elsewhere.	2017 <i>Cacatua galerita</i> SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO Introduced, has bred.
0445 <i>Ardeotis arabs</i> ARABIAN BUSTARD Uncommon extreme south west lowlands. Threatened.	0624 <i>Sterna albifrons</i> LITTLE TERN Uncommon migrant. Has bred freshwater and brackish areas of eastern Saudi Arabia and possibly Red Sea.	2008 <i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i> BUDGERIGAR Introduced, has bred.
0455 <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> BLACK-WINGED STILT Opportunistic breeder wetland habitats, also common migrant.	0625 <i>Sterna saundersi</i> SAUNDER'S TERN Summer visitor to coasts, some likely to be resident.	0720 <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i> DIDRIC CUCKOO Summer visitor to south west, parasitizes Rüppell's weaver.
0456 <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> AVOCET Opportunistic breeder in wetland habitats, also scarce migrant.	0630 <i>Anous stolidus</i> COMMON NODDY Summer visitor to Red Sea, southern Arabia and Oman.	0721 <i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i> KLAAS'S CUCKOO Summer visitor to south west.
0458 <i>Dromas ardeola</i> CRAB PLOVER Breeds Arabian Gulf and Red Sea islands and southern Arabia.	0657 <i>Pterocles lichensteinii</i> * LICHTENSTEIN'S SANDGROUSE Widespread in rocky habitats - not present in central and north eastern areas.	0724 <i>Cuculus canorus</i> EURASIAN CUCKOO Widespread migrant, breeds Musandam.
0461 <i>Burhinus capensis</i> SPOTTED THICK-KNEE Uncommon south west foothills and Tihamah, also Oman.	0658 <i>Pterocles coronatus</i> CROWNED SANDGROUSE Widespread, common only in Oman.	2002 <i>Centropus superciliosus*</i> WHITE-BROWED COUCAL Resident south west lowlands.
0464 <i>Cursorius cursor</i> CREAM-COLOURED COURSER Widespread breeding and apparently a local migrant.	0659 <i>Pterocles senegallus</i> SPOTTED SANDGROUSE Widespread but common only in Oman.	0735 <i>Tyto alba</i> * BARN OWL Widespread resident.
0465 <i>Glareola pratincola</i> COLLARED PRATINCOLE Widespread occasional breeding and common migrant.	0660 <i>Pterocles exustus</i> CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE Widespread except central and northern areas.	2003 <i>Otus senegalensis</i> AFRICAN SCOPS OWL Probably sedentary in south west and Dhofar.
0469 <i>Charadrius dubius</i> LITTLE RINGED PLOVER Breeding summer visitor to freshwater wetlands. Also common migrant.	0662 <i>Pterocles alchata</i> PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE Widespread, often common, winter visitor to northern	0738 <i>Otus brucei</i> BRUCE'S SCOPS OWL Breeds UAE and northern Oman. Scarce elsewhere also a migrant.
		0744 <i>Bubo bubo</i> EAGLE OWL Widespread in north and central areas.
		0745 <i>Bubo africanus</i> SPOTTED EAGLE OWL South west and Oman.

0757	<i>Athene noctua</i> *	LITTLE OWL	Widespread in desert areas.	FINCH LARK Widespread resident but also nomadic with erratic occurrence in many areas.	eastwards.
0762	<i>Strix butleri</i> *	HUME'S OWL	Widespread in rocky habitats.	0954 <i>Eremalauda dunni</i> DUNN'S LARK Widespread and nomadic.	1135 <i>Cercomela melanura</i> BLACKSTART Rocky deserts except in the east and north east.
0772	<i>Caprimulgus inornatus</i>	PLAIN NIGHTJAR	Breeding summer visitor. Scarce in south west.	0955 <i>Ammomanes cincturus</i> BAR-TAILED DESERT LARK Widespread and nomadic.	1139 <i>Saxicola torquata</i> STONECHAT Common migrant and winter visitor. Resident south west highlands.
0773	<i>Caprimulgus nubicus</i>	NUBIAN NIGHTJAR	Breeding summer visitor. Scarce in south west.	0957 <i>Ammomanes deserti</i> * DESERT LARK Sedentary. Widespread in rocky areas.	1145 <i>Oenanthe bottae</i> * RED-BREASTED WHEATEAR South west highlands.
2018	<i>Caprimulgus poliocephalus</i>	MOUNTAIN NIGHTJAR	Local resident western Saudi Arabian highlands.	0958 <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> * HOPOE LARK Widespread open deserts.	1151 <i>Oenanthe moesta</i> RED-RUMPED WHEATEAR Scarce, north west only.
0796	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	PALLID SWIFT	Migrant, and widespread breeding summer visitor.	0960 <i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i> THICK-BILLED LARK Winter visitor northern and central Arabia. Breeds rarely in north.	1154 <i>Oenanthe lugens</i> MOURNING WHEATEAR Widespread winter visitor, resident in northern and north central areas.
2038	<i>Apus berliozi</i>	FORBES-WATSON'S SWIFT	Socotra and possibly coasts of southern Arabia.	0962 <i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i> BIMACULATED LARK Winter visitor especially to north, where has remained to breed.	2020 <i>Oenanthe lugentoides</i> SOUTH ARABIAN WHEATEAR South west highlands, east Yemen and Dhofar.
0798	<i>Apus melba</i>	ALPINE SWIFT	Breeds central plains and south west; scarce migrant elsewhere.	0967 <i>Calandrella cinerea</i> * RED-CAPPED LARK South west highlands.	1155 <i>Oenanthe monacha</i> * HOODED WHEATEAR Scarce but widespread resident.
0800	<i>Apus affinis</i>	LITTLE SWIFT	Resident in south west, vagrant other areas.	0968 <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i> SHORT-TOED LARK Widespread in winter, a few remain to breed.	1156 <i>Oenanthe albioniger</i> HUME'S WHEATEAR Rocky northern parts of Oman and UAE.
0802	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	PALM SWIFT	South west coastlands in the vicinity of Doum Palm.	0970 <i>Calandrella rufescens</i> LESSER SHORT-TOED LARK Widespread winter visitor, some remaining to breed in north.	1157 <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i> * WHITE-CROWNED BLACK WHEATEAR Widespread in rocky areas, status in eastern and southern Arabia is unclear.
0829	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>	GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER	Summer visitor to south west.	0972 <i>Galerida cristata</i> * CRESTED LARK Widespread resident.	1161 <i>Monticola rufigularis</i> * LITTLE ROCK THRUSH South west highlands.
2004	<i>Halcyon chloris</i> *	WHITE-COLLARED KINGFISHER	Local resident Oman/UAE and Red Sea coast.	0979 <i>Eremophila bilopha</i> TEMMINCK'S HORNED LARK Northern and central Arabia. Vagrant Yemen.	1182 <i>Turdus menachensis</i> YEMEN THRUSH South west highlands.
2005	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>	MALACHITE KINGFISHER	Scarce resident eastern Yemen.	0990 <i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i> AFRICAN ROCK MARTIN Widespread, rocky areas.	1225 <i>Parisoma buryi</i> * YEMEN WARBLER South west highlands and foothills.
0837	<i>Merops albicollis</i>	WHITE-THROATED BEE-EATER	Summer visitor to south west. Vagrant elsewhere.	0992 <i>Hirundo rustica</i> SWALLOW Widespread and common migrant; breeding only known from Musandam.	2016 <i>Cisticola haematocephalus</i> * SOCOTRA CISTICOLA Socotra.
0838	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	LITTLE GREEN BEE-EATER	Widespread except the north and north east.	0995 <i>Hirundo daurica</i> RED-RUMPED SWALLOW Breeds south west highlands and locally in central Arabia, scarce migrant elsewhere.	1226 <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> * FAN-TAILED WARBLER South west coastlands, single records Dhofar and Kuwait.
0839	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER	Breeds locally in eastern Arabia, common migrant elsewhere.	1002 <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i> RICHARD'S PIPIT Small resident population in south west highlands. A vagrant in other areas.	2015 <i>Incana incana</i> * SOCOTRA WARBLER Socotra.
0840	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	EUROPEAN BEE-EATER	Breeds locally in eastern Arabia, common migrant elsewhere.	1007 <i>Anthus similis</i> LONG-BILLED PIPIT Resident south west Dhofar and eastern highlands.	1227 <i>Prinia gracilis</i> * GRACEFUL WARBLER Widespread but local in central Arabia.
0841	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	EUROPEAN ROLLER	Migrant, has bred UAE cultivations.	1035 <i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i> WHITE-CHEEKED BULBUL Arabian Gulf, introduced Riyadh.	1231 <i>Scotocerca inquieta</i> * SCRUB WARBLER Widespread except north eastern areas.
0842	<i>Coracias abyssinicus</i>	ABYSSINIAN ROLLER	Resident in south west.	1036 <i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i> * YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL Widespread and common except north east.	1238 <i>Locustella luscinioides</i> SAVI'S WARBLER Scarce migrant, has bred.
0843	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	INDIAN ROLLER	Oman and UAE. scarce winter visitor to north east.	2006 <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> * RED-VENTED BULBUL Introduced and has bred in several Gulf towns.	1241 <i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i> MOUSTACHED WARBLER Local breeder. Winter visitor to north.
0846	<i>Upupa epops</i>	HOPOE	Common migrant. Widespread but scarce breeding.	2007 <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i> * RED-WHISKERED BULBUL Introduced Gulf and Riyadh.	1251 <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> REED WARBLER Common migrant, breeds where dense reedbeds present.
0847	<i>Tockus nasutus</i> *	LITTLE GREY HORNBILL	South west.	1089 <i>Prunella fagan</i> * ARABIAN ACCENTOR Yemen highlands.	2021 <i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i> AFRICAN REED WARBLER Red Sea mangroves.
0890	<i>Dendrocopos doreae</i> *	ARABIAN WOODPECKER	Western highlands and foothills.	1095 <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i> RUFOUS BUSH CHAT Widespread migrant, uncommon but widespread breeding species.	1252 <i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i> CLAMOROUS WARBLER Breeding resident coastal mangroves. Scarce migrant.
0952	<i>Mirafr a cantillans</i>	SINGING BUSH LARK	Southern lowlands including Dhofar.	1096 <i>Cercotrichas podobe</i> BLACK BUSH CHAT Common south west and central regions; range expanding	1253 <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i> GREAT REED WARBLER Migrant, increasing numbers breed.
0953	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>	BLACK-CROWDED			1255 <i>Hippolais pallida</i> OLIVACEOUS WARBLER Migrant and breeding summer visitor.

1256	<i>Hippolais caligata</i>	BOOTED WARBLER	Scarce migrant and winter visitor. breeds mangroves coast of Gulf of Oman.	bred UAE.	1674	<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>	DESERT FINCH	Resident north west Arabia, range extending to central Arabia.
1271	<i>Sylvia leucomelaena*</i>	ARABIAN WARBLER	Western Arabia to Dhofar.		1676	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	TRUMPETER FINCH	Widespread resident, arid rocky areas.
1281	<i>Phylloscopus umbrovirens</i>	BROWN WOODLAND WARBLER	South west highlands.		1688	<i>Carpodacus synoicus</i>	SINAI ROSEFINCH	Resident north west.
1336	<i>Muscicapa gambageae</i>	GAMBAGA FLYCATCHER	South west highlands and foothills.		1863	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>	HOUSE BUNTING	Widespread resident. arid rocky areas.
1353	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	AFRICAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER	South west and Dhofar.		1864	<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>	CINNAMON-BREASTED ROCK BUNTING	Resident south west highlands.
1379	<i>Turdoides squamiceps*</i>	ARABIAN BABBLER	Widespread except the north east.		2013	<i>Emberiza socotra</i>	SOCOTRA BUNTING	Socotra.
1492	<i>Anthreptes metallicus</i>	NILE VALLEY SUNBIRD	South west to Dhofar.		1882	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	CORN BUNTING	Winter visitor, has bred eastern Arabia.
1493	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	PURPLE SUNBIRD	UAE and northern Oman.					This list has been prepared for the use of contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA) project. Further details of the ABBA project and its newsletter, Phoenix, are available from the Project Coordinator, Michael C. Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, UK. Tel/Fax 01487 841733 (International 0044 1487 841733) Email; arabian.birds@dial.pipex.com
1494	<i>Nectarinia habessinica</i>	SHINING SUNBIRD	Western Arabia to Dhofar.					
1495	<i>Nectarinia osea</i>	ORANGE-TUFTED SUNBIRD	Western Arabia to Dhofar.					
2014	<i>Nectarinia balfouri</i>	SOCOTRA SUNBIRD	Socotra.					
1504	<i>Zosterops abyssinica</i>	WHITE-BREASTED WHITE-EYE	South western highlands to Dhofar.					
1508	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	GOLDEN ORIOLE	Uncommon migrant, has bred.					
1509	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>	BLACK-HEADED BUSH SHRIKE	South western to Dhofar.					
1520	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	GREAT GREY SHRIKE	Widespread resident, also a common migrant and winter visitor.					
1549	<i>Pica pica*</i>	MAGPIE	Local, highlands of south west Saudi Arabia.					
1562	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	HOUSE CROW	Coasts of northern UAE and Oman, Aden and major ports elsewhere.					
1571	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	BROWN-NECKED RAVEN	Widespread and common.					
1574	<i>Corvus rhipidurus</i>	FAN-TAILED RAVEN	Rocky areas of western and central Arabia and Dhofar.					
1575	<i>Onychognathus tristramii</i>	TRISTRAM'S GRACKLE	Western highlands to Dhofar.					
2010	<i>Onychognathus frater</i>	SOCOTRA GRACKLE	Socotra.					
2011	<i>Onychognathus blythi</i>	BROWN WINGED GRACKLE	Socotra.					
1576	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>	AMETHYST STARLING	Summer visitor to the south west.					
1582	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	EURASIAN STARLING	Winter visitor, has bred UAE.					
2039	<i>Sturnus contra</i>	PIED MYNAH	Introduced, has					
1587	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	COMMON MYNAH	Introduced and breeds many large towns.					
1588	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	BANK MYNAH	Introduced, UAE.					
1591	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	* HOUSE SPARROW	Common and widespread except Masirah, Socotra and Farasan, not present isolated desert areas and parts of Yemen and Oman.					
1592	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	SPANISH SPARROW	A winter visitor which increasingly breeds.					
2012	<i>Passer motitensis</i>	AFRICAN RUFOUS SPARROW	Socotra.					
1600	<i>Passer euchlorus</i>	ARABIAN GOLDEN SPARROW	Tihama of the south west.					
1601	<i>Petronia brachydactyla</i>	PALE ROCK SPARROW	Erratic migrant and winter visitor. Opportunist breeder.					
1602	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW	Breeding summer visitor to northern Oman and UAE.					
1603	<i>Petronia dentata</i>	LESSER ROCK SPARROW	Local resident Yemen highlands.					
1612	<i>Ploceus galbula</i>	RÜPPELL'S WEAVER	Resident south west, introduced Riyadh where has bred.					
2019	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	BAYA WEAVER	Introduced, has bred.					
2028	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	STREAKED WEAVER	Introduced, has bred.					
2040	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	LESSER MASKED WEAVER	Introduced, has bred Sharjah.					
1616	<i>Estrilda rufibarba*</i>	ARABIAN WAXBILL	South west.					
2029	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	AVADAVAT	Introduced, has bred.					
1617	<i>Amandava subflava</i>	* ZEBRA WAXBILL	Introduced, Yemen.					
1618	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	INDIAN SILVERBILL	Indigenous to eastern Arabia. Has been introduced to central and western parts of the peninsula.					
1619	<i>Euodice cantans</i>	AFRICAN SILVERBILL	Resident western Arabia to Dhofar.					
1645	<i>Serinus rothschildi</i>	ARABIAN SERIN	Resident south west highlands and foothills.					
1646	<i>Serinus menachensis</i>	YEMEN SERIN	Resident south west highlands.					
1647	<i>Rhynchostruthus socotrana</i>	GOLDEN-WINGED GROSBEAK	Resident south west highlands Dhofar and Socotra.					
1653	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	GOLDFINCH	Scarce visitor, breeds north west.					
1661	<i>Carduelis yemenensis</i>	YEMEN LINNET	Resident south west highlands.					

make it the biggest yet. As ever the *EBR* is compiled and edited by Colin Richardson and the bulk of this issue is devoted to the Emirates Bird Report for 1994 consisting of 75 pages. This systematic list shows all birds summarised by the season, for common species, and the actual records for rarities. Included in the annual report are sub-reports on bird watching areas, a review of rarities and first dates of common migrants. Other pages of this bumper issue cover an important survey of seabirds breeding on Abu Dhabi islands and separate reports on other islands, new birds to the UAE (four species) and individual species notes. A paper on large white headed gulls identification will help a lot of confused birdwatchers in the Middle East. *The EBR is published by the Emirates Bird Records Committee and sponsored by Emirates News. It costs £8 including overseas mail and is available from Colin Richardson, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE. This issue is illustrated with 28 colour plates.*

### **Bahrain Bird Report January 1994 to June 1996**

This report is issued as a supplement to the *Bahrain Natural History Society Newsletter* 97/1. It contains a separate report on the Howar island Socotra cormorant colony (about 150,000 adults and young in November 1994). The checklist records several new species for Bahrain which include Indian roller, stock dove, black bushchat, Blythe's and olive-backed pipits, Eurasian linnet and yellowhammer. *Information on availability from the Bahrain Natural History Society, PO Box 1858, Manama, Bahrain.*

### **Oman Bird News No 20 (Winter 1996/97)**

As usual a very good read. Of particular interest are notes on the post-breeding dispersal of bee-eaters, an observation of an Imperial eagle stooping on a gazelle and details of Jouanin's petrel calling from a nesting burrow - in the pacific! This issue has ten colour plates and appears with two supplements, one an index for issues 1-20 and the other a listing of Oman ringed bird recoveries. *OBR 20 and the two supplements are available from the Oman Bird Records Committee, PO Box 246, Muscat 113, Sultanate of Oman, at the price of £3, US\$5 or ORIs 2. No 21 is due out about the same time as this issue of Phoenix.*

### **Sandgrouse Vol 18(2) and 19(1)**

Another 160 pages of essential reading for Middle East bird people. Major papers in 18(2) relevant to Arabia are detailed notes on the breeding of Rüppell's weaver in Yemen and birds of the Barr al Hickman coastal region of Oman. The latter is accepted as the most important site in Oman for wintering and migrant sea and shore birds, including over 1,000 great knot, 5,000 broad-billed sandpipers. Three slender-billed curlew have also been seen there. There are 17 other notes and papers including regular features. Issue 19(1) has papers on Dunn's lark in Yemen, sooty and white-eyed gulls along the Red Sea coast, crab plover plumages, new birds for Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait and regular articles. *Available from the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, c/o the Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England.*

### **Zoology in The Middle East Vols 13 & 14 (1996-7)**

An increasingly respected journal, twelve articles appear in volume 13. One paper is of particular importance to Arabian ornithology

as it concerns the status of the red knot in the Middle East. There have been less than 20 confirmed records throughout Arabia. Another paper describes the breeding of common mynah in Ankara, Turkey - they get everywhere! Other papers of particular note include a review of mammal carnivores in Jordan, turtles nesting in Cyprus and fish of the Tigris-Euphrates. Volume 14 has 15 papers, four concerning birds, four on mammals, two on reptiles and five on insects. Bird papers of Arab world interest are a very useful one on the breeding biology of the spur-winged plover (in Gaza) and another on the diet of the eagle owl (an analysis of pellets from Azraq, Jordan). Other bird papers concern breeding water birds of the Gediz delta, Turkey (includes dalmatian pelican) and the coastal migration of water birds in Cyprus. Arabian mammal papers concern baboons in western Saudi Arabia and a review of mammals in the northern Harrat al Harrah reserve - mentioning 12 species of predators, which includes feral dogs and cats. *ZME is available from Max Kasperek Verlag, Bleichstr 1, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany. Price DM27. ISSN 0939-7140.*

### **Arabian Wildlife Vol 3 No 1**

This issue of 42 pages includes a note on Sir Bani Yas island, which is in many respects is an illustrated update of the paper which appeared in *Phoenix* 12:3. Numerous exotic birds occur on the island. Other bird interest articles include ospreys on the Farasan islands and crab plovers. Snakes in Dhofar, butterfly fish, gazelle in the UAE and baboons are also given coverage. *Arabian Wildlife is available from Trident Press Ltd, 2-5 Old Bond Street, Mayfair, London W1X 3TB UK. Price £3.*

### **New Periodicals**

#### ***Falco***

The Middle East Falcon Research Group which is based in Abu Dhabi is comprised of biologists, conservationists and vets who share a common interest in falcons and birds of prey. The group has published a newsletter since September 1994. The group aims to bring together experts in Middle Eastern countries as well as linking with expertise around the world on the subjects of falcons and falconry generally. Articles in the ten issues so far have covered a wide spectrum of interest from taxonomy, field work, and historical information, to international news, conferences, courses and hybrids but there is a strong bias towards veterinary subjects. The newsletter does not confine itself to the genus *falco* and notes and articles included in it so far have covered eagles as well as owls. *Further details available from Dr Jaime Sanjour, Chairman Middle East Falcon Research Group, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

#### ***Houbara News***

This is a new newsletter prepared by the IUCN/SSC Houbara Species Group as a forum for discussion of the biology and conservation of the houbara throughout its range. Issues 1 and 2 have appeared so far (January and September 1997). They have contained articles on genetic research, migration and other research in the UAE and the expansion of houbara protected areas in Saudi Arabia - three new reserves totalling 7000 sq km. There are also reports on houbara populations in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Xinjiang China and the Canary Islands. *Compiled and produced by ERWDA, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

## Society News:

**Saudi Arabian Natural History Society:** New address MBE 138, P O Box 14021, Jeddah 21424, Saudi Arabia.

**ENHG(AI Ain):** New address. P O Box 18057, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi

**Ornithological Society of the Middle East:** The 1998 OSME AGM will be on 25 July at the School of Oriental and African Studies, near Russell Square, London. Programme and further details to be announced by OSME in Spring 1998.

## Summary Report of ABBA Survey No 21 to Central Oman March 1997

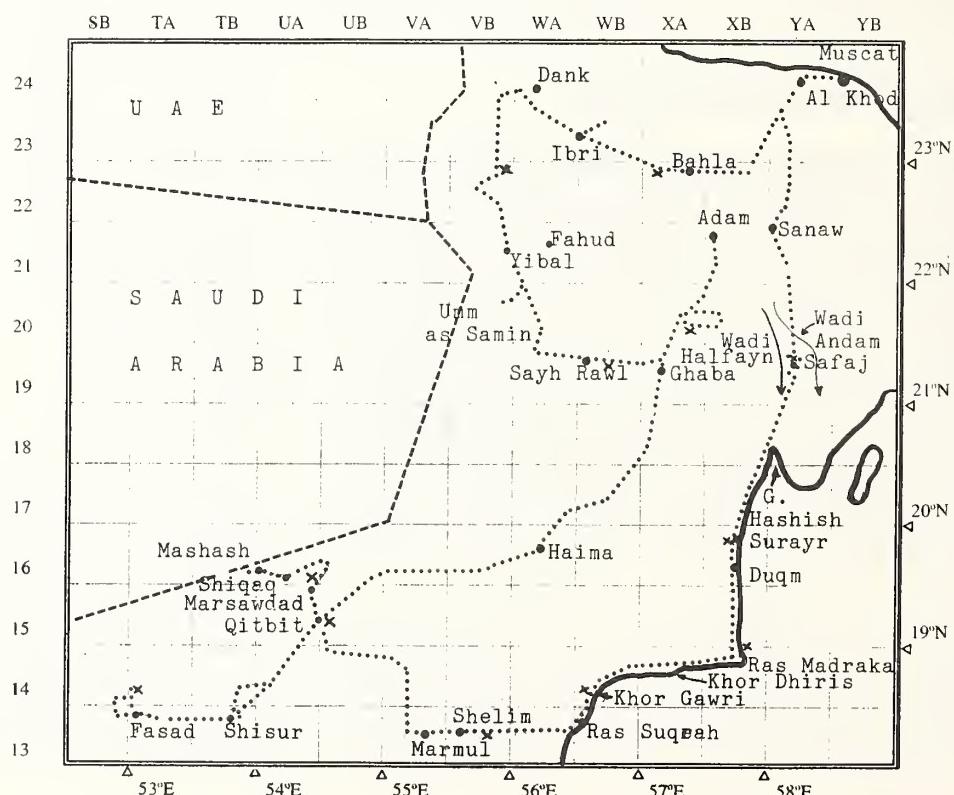
This ABBA Survey was to obtain records from a number of Oman squares for which there were none or very few on both the ABBA and Oman Bird Record Committee databases. Unatlased squares were mainly clustered along the border of Oman with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Yemen with one or two in central Oman. The survey took place between 13-29 March inclusive, I was accompanied throughout by my partner Carol Qirreh. As most of the survey was off the road we hired a four wheel drive vehicle in Muscat.

The survey effectively started on 14 March south-east of Dank (WB24). From there we travelled southwards along the edge of the Rub al Khali (VB24 - VB21), which in this area is mainly isolated sand dune ridges with gravel plains in between, through the oil fields of Yibal and Fahud to Sayh Rawl (WB19). Our route took us across a tongue of the huge Umm as Samin subkha (WA20) that straddles the border with Saudi Arabia. After Sayh Rawl we headed east to join the north-south highway at Ghaba (XA19). The gardens and wadis around Dank and Ibri (WA23) were the last well vegetated habitats we were to see and species such as babbler

*Turdoides squamiceps*, graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*, little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis* and purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* were not seen again until returning north. On the edge of the Rub al Khali typical birds were great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor* (feeding young in the nest), brown necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* (also attending nests) and hoopoe lark *Alaudipes*. In settlements and small irrigated patches house sparrow *Passer domesticus* (which occurs no further south than VB22), Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, palm dove *S. senegalensis* and crested lark *Galerida cristata* were to be found. Desert wheatears *Oenanthe deserti*, a common winter visitor, were occasionally singing. Oman is noted for its quantity and variety of sandgrouse and on this leg we had chestnut-bellied *Pterocles exustus*, spotted *P. senegallus* and crowned *P. coronatus*. A cream coloured courser *Cursorius cursor* was seen in display flight in WB19.

From Ghaba our route was planned to take us further east through two unatlased squares XB20 and XB19 and then on to the Arabian Sea at Ghubbat Hashish (YA18). Unfortunately in square XB20 a major mishap occurred when we received two punctures simultaneously and only had one spare tyre on the vehicle. This forced a return to the highway some 40 km away. Driving on one flat tyre it disintegrated and long before we got back to the road we were down to the metal wheel rim. Reaching the road was not the end of our problems as we then had to hitchhike 100 kms north to Adam (XB21) to find a tyre to enable us to get the vehicle mobile again. This event lost us two days. Before we got the punctures we had found black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* very common in the shallow wadis east of the highway where the heavy spring rains had produced many grasses and ephemeral plants. One curious observation was of a female seen to collect grasses and add it to a nest that already held three eggs. A second courser was displaying in XB20. Desert lark *Annonomanes deserti* occur sparingly in the region on the gravel plains, these had fledged young. A single bar-tailed desert lark *A. cincturus* was seen in XB20, it may have been wandering. A few Egyptian vultures

Fig 8. ABBA Survey No 21 to Central Oman March 1997.



*Neophron percnopterus* were near Ghaba and Adam and in the north but they were not seen again in the drier southern deserts. Up until this time we had experienced some pretty unpleasant weather with high winds and dust most days and nights. We found out later that there had been some exceptionally heavy rain storms in the north and it appears that our own bad weather was on the periphery of this system. In an effort to find calmer conditions we decided that instead of heading east again we would drive south along the highway. On the afternoon of 17 March we drove south to Qitbit (UB15) where we took accommodation for the night at the guesthouse. The Qitbit guesthouse gardens are the only green patch in a wide area of south central Oman but surprisingly they were almost devoid of migrants. The only visiting species found in a half hour census at dawn were a few desert lesser whitethroats *Sylvia minula*, a chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and a swallow *Hirundo rustica*, which was singing. Only three other swallows were seen throughout the survey which indicates just how very few migrants were in the desert at that time. Since my last visit to Qitbit in November 1995 the Eurasian collared dove had colonised these gardens.

From Qitbit we went north and east to Marsawdad (UA15) and then on to Shiqaq (UA16). These are both military camps, the former has a few animal enclosures (rock thrush *Monticola saxatilis* seen there) and the latter has an overflowing artesian well (sulphurous) that was good for a few migrants, including pallid harrier *Circus macrourus* and water pipit *Anthus spinolella*. The final settlement of Mashash (UA16) is right on the Saudi Arabian border surrounded by high dunes. There were a group of 43 brown-necked ravens hanging round the village indicating that for many of the species the breeding season had already finished. Palm dove were the only commensal species in the village. Nearby two presumed nest sites of little owl *Athene noctua* were located, one pair owned a heap of rubble and another a much holed old Ghaf tree *Prosopis cinerea*.

After this we visited the areas to the west of the highway, that is Shisur (TB13) and Fasad (TA13). Just south of Qitbit there are pivot irrigation schemes in squares UA15 and UA14 (Dauka). In the former there was a single white stork *Ciconia ciconia*. It was there 19 and 20 March. Fasad has a number of camel troughs which were excellent spots for sandgrouse observation. The three species already mentioned all coming in to drink. Often in pairs but none were seen to do the characteristic rocking movements to wet their breast feathers and take water back to young. Occasionally the odd chestnut-bellied would come in to drink with a group of crowned. I had not seen mixed flocks before. Palm doves have got to Shisur but they are not yet at Fasad, although the latter had rock doves *Columba livia*. Visitors at Fasad were a forlorn black headed gull *Larus ridibundus* and a white wagtail *Motacilla alba*. Unfortunately the dusty atmosphere and wind was still making birding and camping very unpleasant and rather than go on to the Yemen border we reluctantly returned to Qitbit. In any event just west of Fasad we were in the square adjacent to the easternmost square I had reached in Yemen in the previous month (ABBA survey 21). On the way back to Qitbit we had a pair of Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunni* in SB14 the only ones seen.

On leaving Qitbit the second time we travelled across the hard gravel deserts southeast, towards the oil fields of Marmul (VA13) and from there via Shelim (VB13) to the Arabian sea at Ras Suqrah (WB13). On this leg two squares held bar-tailed desert larks. We camped near Shelim and during the night there we heard

Lichtenstein's sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteini*, little owl and spotted thick-knee *Burhinus capensis* calling. Shelim was also the only place we recorded sand partridge *Amnoperdix heyi*. We did not enter the afrotropical zone of Dhofar at all and the only species recorded with south-west Arabian affinities was the South Arabian mourning wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides* at the edge of its range near Suqrah.

From Ras Suqrah our route took us northwards along the coast to Madraka, (XB15) Duqm (XB16) and Ghubbat Hashish. The coast in this region is backed by low limestone hills which occasionally reached the coast as cliffs. In between there are low lying areas, in places forming subkha. Extensive subkhas occur near and north of Duqm. Unfortunately the weather deteriorated as we progressed northwards, becoming overcast with frequent showers. It was also surprisingly cold for the time of year. The coastal region produced a wide variety of gulls, terns and waders. These included masked booby *Sula dactylatra*, great white egret *Egretta alba* and osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. A party of 30 crab plover *Dromas ardeola* were resting on the tide line at Khor Gawri (WB14). At Khor Dhiris (XA16) there were a flock of 200 Saunders' tern *Sterna saundersi*, a group of coot *Fulica atra*, five avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and a spotted eagle *Aquila clanga* which had presumably wintered there. There are rocky cliffs at Ras Madraka but the fishing village nearby had some muddy tidal spots which held a flock of 22 Pacific golden plover *Pluvialis fulva* and three oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*. Duqm is a fishing centre and the activities of fishermen had attracted large numbers of gulls, some 10,000 sooty gulls *Larus hemprichii* and 5,000 herring/lesser black-backed gulls *L. argentatus/fuscus* were present. A flock of 600 Socotra cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* were feeding communally in the Ras Duqm area.

North of Duqm there were met pools of water on the subkha which gradually became more extensive the further north we went. In square YA18 the landscape took on the appearance of a large lake with only the slightly raised edges to the graded track protruding through the water as a guide for driving. On 25 March in YA18 and YA19 we drove north through some 80 kms of such inundated areas, until we reached the Wadi Andam which was in flood and totally impassable. The waters of this wadi were some 250 m across and approximately a metre and a half deep and flowing as fast as one could run. The Wadi Andam drains a large part of the Eastern Hajar mountains far to the north. The parallel Wadi Halfayn, only about 5 kms to the west, drains a large part of the Jebel Akhdar. The Wadi Halfayn was also in flood and, if anything deeper, wider and faster than the Wadi Andam. When in flood these two wadis intermingle and it was also clear that the flood waters were emptying in the already inundated subkhas behind us. We were on a parcel of land slightly above the level of the two wadis and were marooned. We could not go back, sideways or forwards and had to remain there for four more days until the Wadi Andam was low enough to attempt a crossing. Our island was populated by a number of other stranded travellers including four fish lorries on the way from Masirah to Dubai. Luckily there was also a petrol station and a small shop at the settlement, known locally as Safaj, which was able to sustain us. We were able to ford the Wadi Andam on the fifth day, 29 March. Unfortunately when crossing the vehicle was immersed in a well of deep water which required a earthmoving tractor to pull us out and resulted in the loss and damage of quite a bit of equipment. To our surprise the vehicle started again and we were able to get to Muscat in time to catch our booked flight out that night. We never did get to XB19.

The Safaj area was well wooded with Ghaf trees. Birds in the area included yellow throated sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis* (quite common) pallid swift *Apus pallida*, desert lark, chestnut-bellied and Lichtenstein's sandgrouse, Eurasian collared dove (common), little green bee-eater and crested lark.

The vegetation on central Oman was surprisingly different to that noted in eastern Yemen in the previous month (ABBA Survey 20). The Ghaf is a common tree in northern Oman and occurs in quite thick forests as far south as near Marsawdad and isolated trees are found to just north of Shisur. However the Ghaf tree is not found at all in Yemen. On the other hand *Moringa* and *Leptadenia* are common in Yemen but the former was not seen in Oman and the latter was relatively scarce. In both countries *Acacia* sp. are widespread. Large *Maerua crassifolia* trees were common in Yemen but in Oman only rare, stunted specimens were found. There was much ephemeral vegetation in Oman on account of recent local rains giving a very green landscape in places - especially between Haima and Qitbit. Eastern Yemen had experienced a drought the previous winter and possibly for several years and was devoid of small green plants.

Not much other wildlife was seen. We saw a hare *Lepus capensis* in UA16, a red fox *Vulpes vulpes* in VB13, a gazelle *Gazella* sp. in XA14 and two hedgehog *Paraechinus* sp. remains on the road at TB13. Worrel lizards *Varanus griseus* were seen on three occasions (WB19, SB13 and WB14) but the Dhuh *Uromastyx nticolepis* was more common. A single sand boa *Eryx jayakari* was found dead at Safaj.

In view of the bad weather, lost time through mishaps and the failure to get to some of the places that had been intended, the results of this survey were somewhat disappointing. Never-the-less the survey covered a total of 45 atlas squares of which three had no previous ABBA records recorded for them and a further 12 squares had three or less species recorded in them.

Carol and I would like to thank Jens and Hanne Eriksen for their very kind hospitality on the day we arrived in Oman and also the day we departed and for providing us with numerous items of equipment to assist our camping, advice on places that might possibly be visited and much other help. We also wish to thank the benefactor (who wishes to remain anonymous) who kindly sponsored the cost of the hire of a four wheel drive vehicle, without which it would not have been possible to have visited any of the new squares we were able to get to.

Michael C Jennings.

## Bald Ibis Again

The search for the illusive bald ibis in Yemen continues with the Yemen Ornithology Society offering a reward of 10,000 Yemeni riyals to anyone who can provide evidence of it in that country. The project produced quite a number of responses including one (discounted) record of bald ibis being seen on a bird table! More interestingly a Somali expatriate in Yemen provided details of possible nesting in northern Somalia. News has also been received from Chris Bowden who is coordinating the RSPB's Bald Ibis Research Project. He has turned up a record from Mike Hands who was in Yemen in the 1970's, who found five ibises at rock ledge nests to the north-west of Yarim (KA05), Yemen. On the face of it this seems very good evidence of breeding - further details

are eagerly awaited.

Nejat Özkan the Deputy General Director of the Turkish Department of Game and Wildlife has advised of a Turkish initiative to ring bald ibis at the Birecik colony in south-east Turkey.

The wild population at Birecik became extinct in 1990. However there are around 70 birds still at Birecik. Every year in February caged birds are released into the wild and they breed at the traditional site. Additional food is however provided. The traditional migration southwards commences after July. During August the released birds are taken back into captivity because they do not migrate. If this were not done many would die. However some 10-15 birds are disappearing each year from Birecik. They are thought to migrate south but no data is available on where they go to. In recent years wintering bald ibis have been recorded in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

During 1997 the Game and Wildlife Department in Turkey will start a ringing project of all the bald ibis at Birecik. Although we would all like to think the bald ibises in Yemen and Saudi Arabia are from an as yet undiscovered colony, hopefully in Arabia, it seems the birds seen in recent years have probably come from Turkey. Those lucky enough to see a bald ibis should keep a special look out for rings in future. If ringed birds are seen then information on date, co-ordinates, activity of the bird seen and the number of birds, are important for the project. The project organisers also regard it as important to establish information about the ringing of the bald ibis in other Middle Eastern countries. As far as the Turkish project organisers are aware there are no ringing records for the species, so if anyone knows different they should advise Nejat.

*Details to be sent to Nejat Özkan, Deputy General Director, Department of Game and Wildlife, Ministry of Forestry, Orman Bakanlioi, Gazi Tesisleri 11 No'lü Bina Kat:3 06560, Gazi/Ankara, Turkey. Tel: (90) 312 221 17 69 Fax (90) 312 222 51 40.*

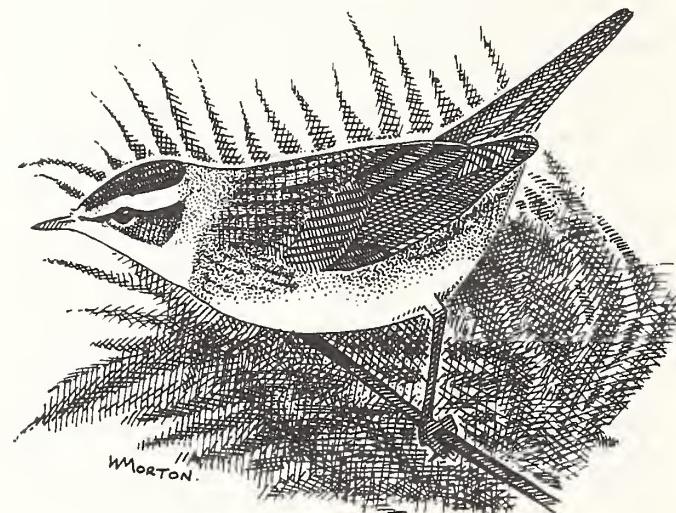


Fig 9. There has long been a small local resident population of moustached warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* near Hufoof (PB28) in the Eastern Province. In recent years they have started to breed elsewhere. A pair were feeding two juveniles in phragmites June 1996 at the al Hair water course, south of Riyadh (MB25), (D.James). Also seen most days May and June 1997 near Jubail (PB31) including at least four juveniles (B.S.Meadows).

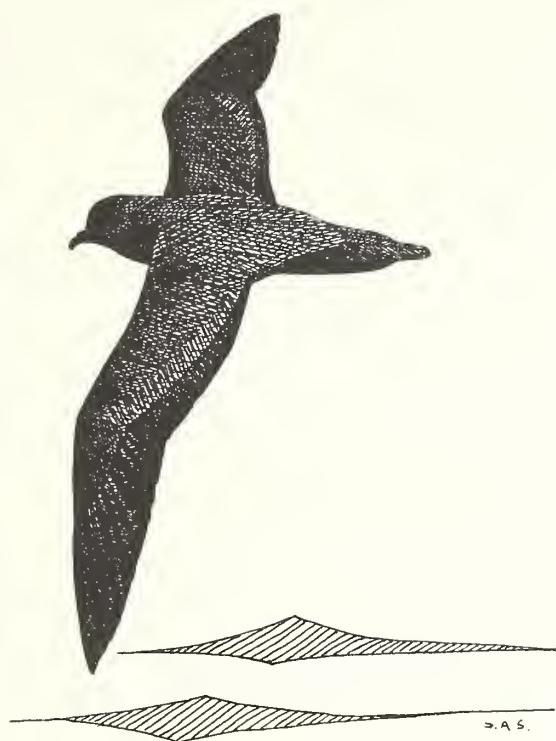


Fig 10. Although widespread off the coasts of southern Arabia the breeding quarters of Jouanin's petrel *Bulweria fallax* are still unknown.

## Abu Dhabi's New Environmental Research And Wildlife Development Agency

Abu Dhabi's new Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, known by its acronym "ERWDA", is now

operational. ERWDA was established in 1996, and its prime objective is to enhance the sustainable development of Abu Dhabi Emirate's environment and wildlife. The agency's recently appointed Secretary General is Dr Saif Al Ghais, a local Marine Biologist seconded from the University of the UAE. The agency's four major functions are; terrestrial environmental research, marine research, wildlife veterinary hospital and research and environmental impact assessments.

The National Avian Research Centre (NARC) has been absorbed into ERWDA and its staff and aims will focus on broader environmental and wildlife issues. The houbara bustard and the saker falcon which were of special concern to NARC are still an important element within ERWDA. Address; ERWDA, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

## Houbara Bustard are Satellite Tracked, from the UAE to Asia

Five wild houbara bustard caught and released by ERWDA researchers are being tracked from their wintering grounds, in the UAE, to their breeding grounds in Central Asia. Fitted with solar powered satellite transmitters which researchers hope will enable them to follow the houbara for two years of their life both on their breeding and wintering grounds.

Houbara are notoriously difficult to trap alone on their wintering grounds, because they cover such very wide areas. To cope with this a disarmed falcon was specially prepared to catch them. The falcon's talons had plastic beads glued to their points and its beak was masked to prevent injury to the houbara when they were caught in the air. Eight houbara were successfully trapped in this way in March this year. Rangers from the Animal Welfare Society, in the western area of Abu Dhabi Emirate, helped during the catch and release of the birds. Of these, six had satellite transmitters placed on their backs. One houbara subsequently migrated south

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- h. Birds of the Rub al Khali periphery

5. **Atlasing Arabian Birds** A collection of the summary reports on the 22 ABBA surveys to date. These have reached every corner of Arabia and includes notes on birds seen, other wildlife, places, topography and sketch maps £20.

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to Saudi Arabia where transmission was lost, but the other five, after remaining four to five weeks in the capture area, migrated northwards. In mid May 1997 one of the five birds was in Iran, one in Afghanistan and three were in Uzbekistan. In total, NARC, and now ERWDA, have successfully satellite tagged and followed twenty houbara on migration.

**Stop Press.** News received as this issue goes to press is that one of the birds went on to spend the summer in China, where it probably bred. It returned to the Emirates in Autumn 1997, a round trip of some 12,300 km.

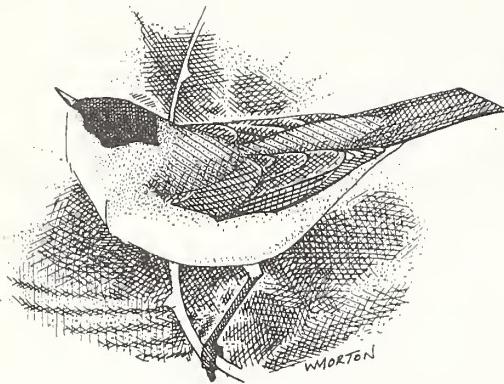


Fig 11. There are several records (1987-93) of oversummering blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* in landscaped parkland, with much ground cover, Yanbu industrial city (EA25). Also singing June-July, (B S Meadows).

## Riyadh River, Saudi Arabia; Notes on Breeding Birds

In the course of an investigation into migrant birds along the river at al Ha'ir (24°21'N, 46°57'E, ABBA square MB26) and neighbourhood (MB25), 12 April - 5 May 1996, the following information was obtained incidentally on breeding, and suspected breeding, birds. The al Ha'ir river is a permanent feature,

originating in 1976, resulting from the run-off from the treated sewage water system for Riyadh. Along the course of the river large areas of woodland, marshland and open water have developed, providing highly favourable habitat for breeding and visiting birds of many species. Notes and comments on breeding evidence for selected species are as follows.

Purple heron *Ardea purpurea* and night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Each day 10-20 purple herons and 20-40 night herons showed close attachment to the site, suggested they were possibly breeding on the undisturbed southern side of the river (MB26).

Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Small parties totalling over 100 birds moved daily to the irrigated farms further down the river and returned upstream in the evenings to a possible breeding area.

Little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Most birds were definitely on migration, with 1-7 daily throughout the period, 15 on 18 April and ten on 4 May; some individuals were shown by ringing to be present for at least 17 days. An empty nest in tall reeds on 27 April may have belonged to this species; and a juvenile caught and photographed on 4 May must have been bred locally. (MB26).

Ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca*

A pair was seen regularly in the netting area (MB26), and another pair with 4-6 young were at the dam site on 20 April (MB25).

Spotted crake *Porzana porzana*

A common species in the area with up to four daily, but 5-10 on 16-22 April. Some were controlled at the same site after up to eight days, and it is possible that they breed in the area (MB26).

Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*

Up to six recorded on 14 days. A nest with a fresh egg was found on 17 April, but was later destroyed in a storm (MB26).

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#### Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

A very common breeding bird with 50+ recorded daily in the study area. Most nests were in tamarisks and contained eggs or young during our stay; fledged young were also seen. One nest was in reeds only a metre above the water (MB26).

#### White-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

A common breeding resident with at least 25 daily in the study area. Occupied nests and newly fledged young were found and all females handled possessed fully developed brood patches (MB26).

#### Rufous bush chat *Cercotrichas galactotes*

There were single birds on four days only, 18-26 April. A female caught on 25 April had an active brood patch and was presumably breeding nearby (MB26).

#### Black bush chat *Cercotrichas podobe*

Up to six observed each day were probably all local birds. There were at least three territorial pairs at the ringing site. A female caught on 4 May had a brood patch, but others handled seemed to be passage birds (MB26).

#### Reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A very common breeding bird all along the river. Usually 20-50 were recorded daily, including both local residents and passing migrants. Nests were found with eggs or young in both reeds and small tamarisk bushes (MB26). Based on the age of fledged young birds caught, egg-laying commenced in February and raises the question whether this is a non-migrant population. Breeding birds were identified as *A. s. fuscus*.

#### Basra reed warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*

There were up to four birds daily from 14 April onwards. Prolonged song and territorial behaviour, long stays of retrapped birds, and attachment to catching sites, strongly indicated breeding, but this was not proved. At least three birds held territories within the netting area from 14 April and ringed birds were controlled throughout the rest of the period. Territories were all in tall reeds mixed with a few tamarisk trees in the lake-like part of the river (MB26).

#### Olivaceous warbler *Hippolais pallida*

A common breeding species and passage migrant along the river in tamarisks. Newly fledged young were caught from late April onwards (MB26). The second commonest migrant. But only females with brood patches could be separated from the migrants. Four birds which had been ringed at this site in April 1993 were controlled again this spring, some of them breeding.

#### Pale rock sparrow *Petronia brachydactyla*

Two pairs were present in the desert just to the north of the ringing station. On 27 April a nest with four newly hatched chicks was found 50 cm above the ground in a small acacia bush, but two days later they had gone, perhaps taken by one of the shrikes using this bush to hunt from (MB26).

#### Avadavat *Anamandava amandava*

A small party with adults, immatures and dependant young being fed was seen fairly regularly in riverside reeds (MB26).

#### Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

Up to four were seen on most days; a party of 13 on 21 April, then small parties regularly. Some of the females had fully developed

brood patches (MB26).

#### Desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

One on 27 April and four on 29 April at the ringing site. Three females caught had brood patches (MB26).

Other local breeding species observed or caught were little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, coot *Fulica atra*, moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, rock dove *Columba livia*, rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, crested lark *Galerida cristata*, yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*, blackstart *Cercomela melanura*, Indian myna *Acridotheres tristis* and house sparrow *Passer domesticus*.

Acknowledgements: we thank the staff of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) for their help and close collaboration, and Mike Jennings for comments on an earlier draft.

Gerhard Nikolaus, Bosenbuttel 4, 27637 Spieka, Germany  
Dr John S. Ash, Godshill Wood, Fordingbridge, Hants. SP6 2LR, UK.



Fig 12. Black crowned tchagra *Tchagra senegala* are a typical bird of thick vegetation on the Tihama and foothills of the south-west, with an isolated population in Dhofar.

## Socotra Cormorant Colonies in the UAE in the 1970's

In the early 1970's John Stewart-Smith had unique opportunities to visit some UAE islands whilst employed by the Abu Dhabi Defence Force. He has very kindly provided a manuscript of his ornithological observations in the UAE (and earlier in Saudi

Arabia). The following note on Socotra cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* breeding on Arabian Gulf islands is a much summarised extract from his manuscript. It is now well known that Socotra cormorant colonies in the Arabian Gulf hold large numbers of ticks whose bites produce fever and lesions in humans. During his visit to Zaraku island John was bitten by a tick/mite which caused a local swelling which remained for several days. Other symptoms he experienced were tiredness, confusion, loss of memory and a general feeling of being unwell. Zaraku is shown as Zerkouh or Zarka on some maps (Ed).

On 26 October, 1972 I flew a reconnaissance aircraft over a small islet which was marked on my charts as South Farayat at 24°23'N, 51°42.30'E (RB25). The islet is only about 250 m long by 50 m wide. It is some 10 kms offshore from the mainland. I took pictures of a colony of Socotra cormorants from low level, using cameras which were fitted to the aircraft. When I processed the films there were 1338 occupied nests visible within a level area of about 450 square metres of sand. The nests were in two distinct, almost joined, groups. There were no signs of any young birds in my pictures, nor was there any sign of eggs. The adults did not leave their nests during my low-level passes.

I was able to visit the island again on 29 October 1972 making a landing by helicopter some distance from the colony. There were over a thousand adults, all sitting on nests but apparently still uneasy after the clatter of my unseen arrival on their island. I began taking pictures while making notes of everything which struck me as worth recording. As I got closer to the birds I could see that their eyes were a brilliant emerald green and that they had indistinct

black spots on their backs and their wing coverts - rather like the dark spotted veils ladies used to wear on their hats. Then I saw hundreds of young birds gathered where the two breeding areas met. These ungainly and ugly youngsters were a dirty white all over, and covered in ragged down. These young birds must have been hiding in the shadows of the overhanging ledges when I took the first pictures three days previously.

The adults suddenly took fright at my approach and flopped into the sea in silence, pattering across the surface of the water before settling in a closely packed group about 200 metres away from me. I took this opportunity to have a quick look through the nests of the colony. The nests were simple mounds of soft sand with a depression in the centre to hold the eggs and the hatchlings, until the youngsters were agile enough to scrabble out of the nest and join the creche of larger, flightless juveniles at the edges of the colony.

The eggs were plain white and quite small for the size of the birds. The shells were of roughish texture and without any gloss. The average number of eggs in a nest seemed to be about three; some had two, some four and one had five. I suspected that the nest with five eggs may have held the product of two birds because the nest closest to it had only one egg, and these two nests were closer together than average. I measured ten eggs and they averaged 61 mm long and 40 mm wide.

The northern and southern extremities of the whole colony had eggs in the nests. Moving towards the centre of the colony, I found tiny young birds, still pink and totally helpless. Some of these tiny

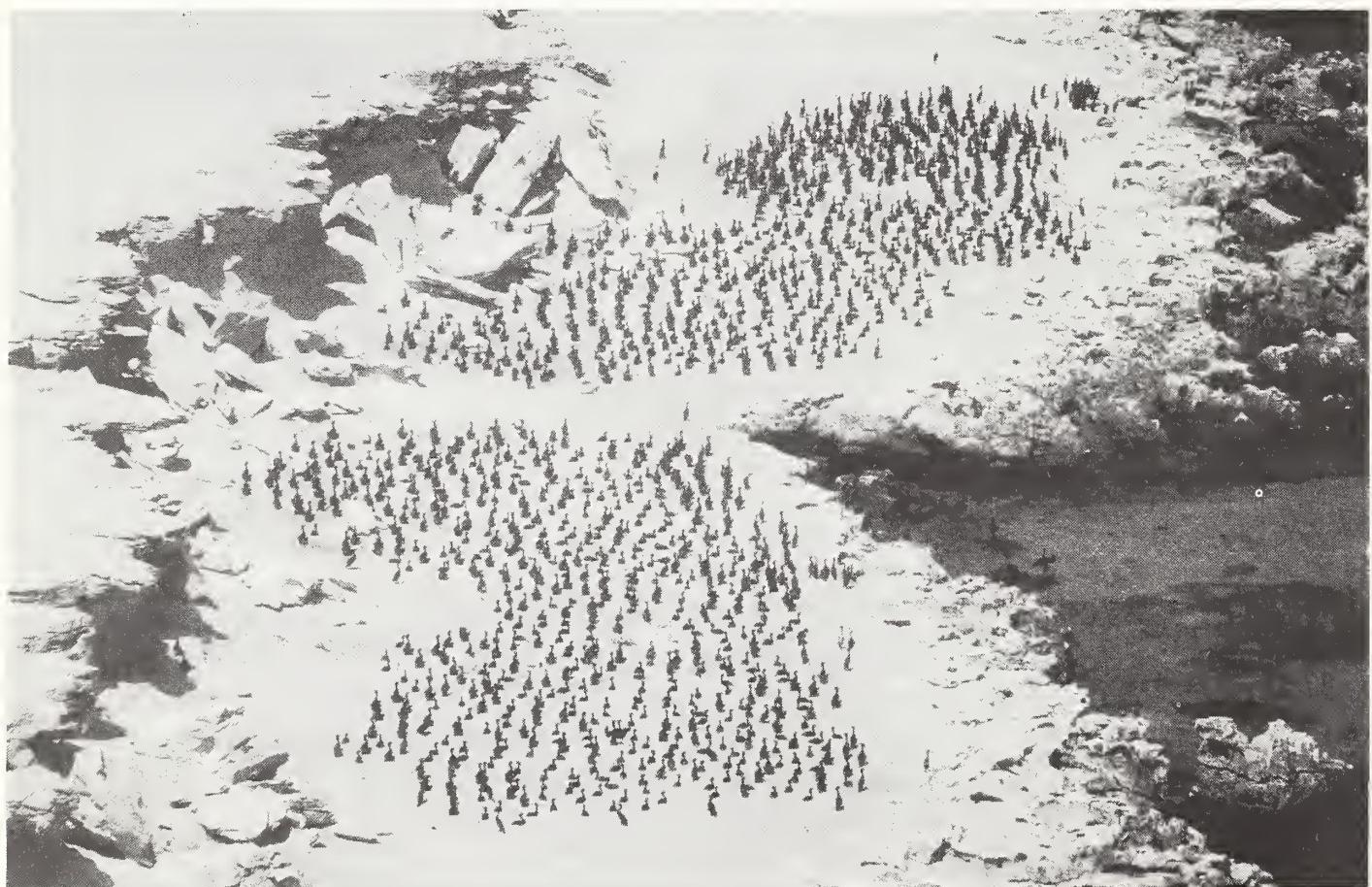


Fig 13. Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* colony south Farayat island 26 October 1972.

pink cormorants had dark blotches on their skins, almost like freckles. They had tufts of very fine white down beginning to sprout from their pale skins. There were larger young in the nests closer to the centre of the colony and the nests right at the middle were empty. The young birds from these central nests had waddled off and congregated in an untidy huddle under the shade of the lip of the central plateau. There were a few dead chicks around the nests, with most desiccated bodies being closest to the centre of the nesting area. Everything pointed to the colony having extended outwards from the centre as the late arrivals joined the breeding area. This extension was constrained by the sea to the east and by the plateau to the west, so the expansion progressed north and south from the first few nests. There were piles of compacted sprats, or fry, lying about the nests, apparently regurgitated by the adults to feed their chicks, or their sitting mates. A few discarded feathers lay about, but otherwise the area was just bare, sun-baked sand.

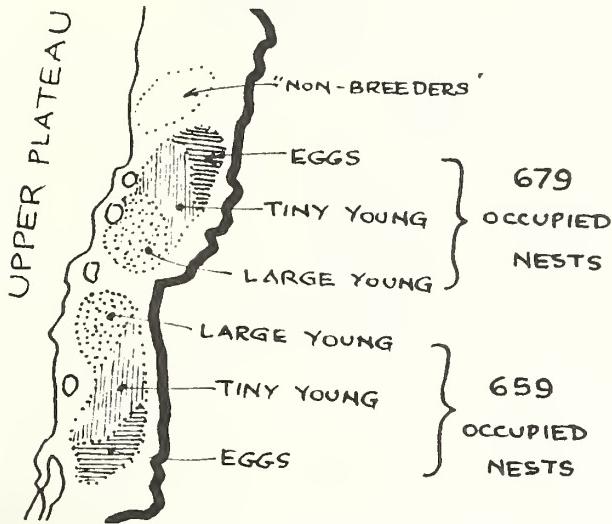


Fig 14. Sketch of nest contents South Farayat Socotra cormorant colony 29 October 1972.

I moved away from the breeding area as the adults on the water showed signs of wanting to return to their nests. I did not want to hazard the very young chicks by leaving them exposed to the heat of the sun for too long. The adults soon settled back onto their nests when I moved away. The surface temperature of the sand was reasonably cool to the touch and a brisk southerly off-shore breeze made the air quite pleasant with a temperature of about 35°C.

I wondered how the adults managed to form cohesive nest mounds from the very fine sand, but guessed that the water from their plumage helped to cement the grains to some extent. The birds probably scrape the sand into a heap with their large webbed feet which are well-equipped with long nails. The sand grains appeared to be globular rather than flat in section and I found that I could take a handful of sand and mould it into a compact ball by wetting it in the sea. As I left the area, it struck me that there were very few empty eggshells about, although some of the chicks were only a few hours old. There were no eggshells to be seen in the sea close to the island, so perhaps the adults eat their shells to conserve calcium, or perhaps they carry the shells away from the colony. The other oddity about this colony became more obvious as the adult birds settled back onto their nests after my disturbance. All the adults sat facing the same way - north. I guessed that this could have been because the adults needed to shade the eggs and nestlings from the full heat of the midday sun, but that didn't quite make sense to me.

I then wondered if the adults just didn't like sitting facing into the sun, but that didn't seem logical either as the midday sun is quite high overhead at 24°N, even in October.

There were no flies and few insects seen on South Farayat. There was a large shark swimming around close to the island, so I suppose the cormorants suffer losses as the youngsters take to the water. The non-sitting cormorants seemed to group together, but stayed apart from the birds sitting on the nests. The nests were crowded together as close as the birds' neck length would allow, yet there was plenty of apparently suitable breeding area still unoccupied. They must need the stimulus of a closely-packed colony for breeding.

In November 1972 a friend, Dan Carter, returning from a photo-recce flight over the Arabian Gulf islands told me that he had seen a vast flock of dark birds on the sea around Zarakkhu island (24°53'N, 53°03'E) (TA26). He added that there were thousands of these birds apparently nesting on the rising ground on one side of the island. He had taken photographs of the flock of birds on the sea, having mistaken them for an oil slick at first. We processed the films, some of the exposures were literally covered in thousands upon thousands of cormorants. Which according to Dan showed only a part of the masses of birds there. I sectioned one picture and did an estimate of the number of birds on that one picture. The answer came out to be over 50,000 on one frame.

In early December 1972 I was able to make a photo reconnaissance mission myself to the Zarakkhu and other islands in the southern Arabian Gulf. South Farayat, where Socotra cormorants had been nesting in October, was deserted, but there was a flock of about 300 immature cormorants on North Farayat, 2km to the north. There were also several hundred birds in the water. Another small island, al Qaffay (RB26) held a few cormorants. Arzanah island (SB26) had a few hundred cormorants which were obviously nesting and about 250 juveniles walking around the higher central ridge of this islet. Qarnayn island (SB26) also had a small breeding population of Socotra cormorants.

Zarakkhu island is one of the larger islands in this part of the Arabian Gulf and at that time was uninhabited and deserted. There were thousands upon thousands of cormorants nesting on the sandy slopes of the island, from sea level up to about 130 m. The nests were particularly concentrated on the north-eastern side of the island. A few red-billed tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* were congregated around the northern tip of the island. I spent some time taking aerial photographs, including a continuous overlap mosaic series covering the whole length of the north-eastern slopes where most nests were congregated. I then climbed to 3,000 m and took some vertical shots covering the whole island on a single exposure.

On 16 Dec 1972 I was able to visit the island again this time by boat from Abu Dhabi to spend two days and a night alone on the island. I was dropped on the southern tip of Zarakkhu island at dusk and I was able to make my first observations in brilliant moonlight. After walking for about half an hour I skirted a large nesting colony of cormorants as they grunted at me in their slightly disdainful manner. I moved on up the east side of the island and set up my camp for the night.

The cormorants began to move around and take to the air just before sunrise. I was taking pictures by 5.30 as thousands of

cormorants crossed the sky between me and the pre-dawn glow in the east. The only sound was a constant wheezing of wings as the dark birds milled around the island. Many of the cormorants on Zarakkhu had white bellies but those in breeding plumage looked almost totally black at a distance. The sheer numbers of birds made it difficult to concentrate on individuals, which is exactly why bird gather in flocks. The massed numbers confuse the concentration of predators. I estimated that I could see upwards of 250,000 cormorants from where I sat.

I moved further along the eastern slopes and took pictures of the nests, breeding birds, eggs and chicks as I went. The birds, nests and chicks were exactly the same as those I had studied on South Farayat in October but the eggs on Zarakkhu were a very pale blue instead of the flat white I had recorded at Farayat. It was impossible to avoid the nesting sites as there was virtually no space unoccupied by nest mounds. I moved slowly through the colony as the cormorants grunted, rattled their bills and moved into the air in a swirling cloud of acrid dust. The birds returned to their nests as soon as I sat down, with just those nests closest to me remaining uncovered. The rocks and gravelly sand were liberally coated with guano and the whole place smelled very strongly of cormorants. I moved as far as I could from the apparent centre of this group of nests and sat to take notes and more pictures. The breeding adults were in very attractive plumage with almost all birds having matt black spots on the wing coverts over glossy black wing feathers. These black wing coverts had indistinct bronze tips. There were just a few birds in this vast colony which were quite different in colour. I assumed that these odd birds were possibly a rare colour morph. Whatever the facts were, I took pictures of a few of these odd cormorants, including one bird in flight which shows an individual of almost totally pale bronze colour. The juveniles are much paler overall than the adults. These juvenile birds do not seem to come near the breeding sites and keep to the sea or shoreline. The oddly coloured birds I mentioned were inside the breeding areas, although I did not see one of these different cormorants actually sitting on a nest.

I continued towards the northern end of the island and saw more red-billed tropicbirds flying overhead. An osprey *Pandion haliaetus* posed prettily right above my head as he tried to hover while looking down at my camera.

There were some immature sooty gulls *Larus hemprichii* and a flock of turnstone *Arenaria interpres* on the sandy shore as well as thousands of Socotra cormorants at all stages of development. The tropicbirds seemed to thin out overhead as I moved away from the northern end of the island.

I continued to wander about and found a huge nest on the shore which was the work of a pair of osprey. The nest was about 1.3m high and 1.6m in diameter and constructed of twigs, rubbish, nylon rope, a plastic bottle or two and general flotsam.

John Stewart-Smith, 24 Carneton Close, Crantock, Newquay, Cornwall, TR8 5RY, UK.



Fig 15. The black bush chat *Cercotrichas podobe* is a typical species of the Yemen Tihama. This illustration and that of the grey hornbill (Fig 5), are taken from the OSME/BirdLife Arabic booklet which has been distributed to schools in Yemen.

## Abu Dhabi and the Liwa, July 1997: Summary Report of ABBA Survey No 22

I was working for two days in Abu Dhabi (UA25) in the UAE during July and was able to add on a few days leave to have a mini ABBA Survey of the western regions of that Emirate. I had long wanted to visit the Liwa oasis region which lies some 200 kms south-west of Abu Dhabi city. In this region water draining from the Empty Quarter, lies near the surface and traditionally the area has been a centre for date growing. The Liwa is a chain of villages which lie in a crescent between TA22 and UA22, centred on TB23. It is a region of 100 m high sand dunes but today the valleys between the dunes have been irrigated by many deep wells and there is an unbroken chain of date groves, vegetable fields and even forestry projects.

After leaving Abu Dhabi on 14 June I went first to the oil field at Bu Hasa (TA24) and the plantations near Habshan (TB24). This is one of many forests of individually irrigated trees, mainly introduced mesquite *Prosopis juliflora*, that are scattered over the western Abu Dhabi region. Many plantations are of 20 hectares or more and now act as bridges to allow species to disperse from the northern UAE into western Abu Dhabi. The forest at Habshan was typical of these roadside woodlands, it is some 200 m wide by 10 km long. Singing rufous bushchat *Cercotrichas galactotes* were

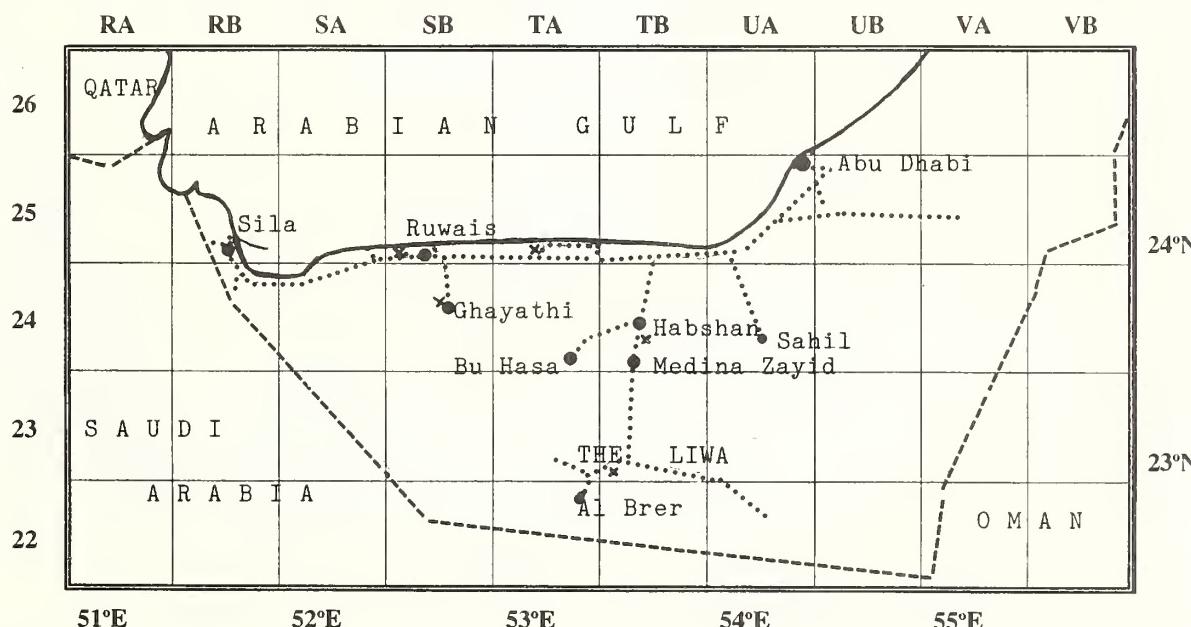
first seen here. This bird was later found in almost every square inland as well as on the coast, wherever there were gardens and good vegetational cover. Several of these records were new to the ABBA database this is because it is a breeding summer visitor and not many observers are active in these regions in summer. The Habshan plantation also held grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* (the furthest west it was heard was Bu Hasa), the westernmost populations in the UAE. Also at Bu Hasa I found white-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* and a pair of common mynah *Acridotheres tristis*. None of these three species were to be seen in the Liwa proper during the next few days but they will probably get there very soon. I camped the first night at the Habshan plantation. Other typical birds of this region were great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, palm dove *S. senegalensis* and black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*.

I reached the Liwa the next day after spending a couple of hours looking round the new city of Medina Zayid (TB24). I find it exciting how bird populations develop and ranges expand and contract and I was particularly interested to compare what could be found in this town in July 1997 with Colin Richardson's report on a visit there and to the Liwa in March 1988 (*Phoenix* 5:6-7). Colin specifically mentions that he found no house sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Medina Zayid during his visit. They are now abundant, indeed they are abundant throughout the Liwa oasis. Colin only had two house sparrows in the Liwa in TB23. The house sparrow is well known as a recent colonist of many parts of Arabia and such a dramatic population increase and range expansion in less than a decade underlines how well commensal species do once they arrive at a suitable habitat previously too remote for them. Arabian house sparrows seem to be very sedentary and have probably only been able to colonise the Liwa recently through the corridors of new human settlements and irrigated areas. Another new bird to colonise Medina Zayid since 1988 is the Eurasian collared dove which was also common. Rufous bushchat were common in Medina Zayid, but they were not mentioned by Colin, it would have been too early for them during his March visit. Colin provides a description of the Liwa which seems to have changed considerably in the last few years. Today many thousands of hectares have been planted with vegetables and forests and there are many new gardens. Whole dune systems have been levelled for cultivation. indeed during my visit I saw one instance where a team

of 12 large bulldozers were working on levelling a 1 km long 50 m high dune.

As one reaches the Liwa the road bifurcates, the right hand route curves west and southwards and eventually becomes a track reaching the Saudi Arabian border at al Brer (TA22). The left track goes to UA23 and UA22 with many new irrigation projects. I spent 15 and 16 July exploring these roads. Further comparison of my observations with Colin Richardson's are most enlightening. Colin comments that Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica* were the second most common species, occurring in groups of up to 15 birds at all cultivations and that brown-necked ravens *Corvus ruficollis* were widespread. I found not a single example of either species. The absence of the silverbill is probably explained by their nomadism, they obviously find an easier living in other parts of the Emirates in midsummer. The absence of the brown-necked raven was a surprise, indeed I did not see a single raven during the whole six days of the survey. I had noticed before that they are absent from large parts of central Arabia in mid-summer. They tend to congregate around large towns and rubbish dumps from about late May onwards, having normally finished breeding by about the end of March. I had not realised until this survey how complete an exodus there is from the interior deserts. On the basis of my Liwa experience I would suggest that these ravens are probably absent from the whole of the Empty Quarter during midsummer. Other birds I found to be typical of the Liwa were palm dove, European collared dove (a recent colonist), turtle dove *Streptopelia tutur* (cooing and on eggs), graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis* and great grey shrike. Hoopoe lark *Alaudon alaudipes* and black-crowned finch lark were present on the desert edges but the crested lark *Galerida cristata* was surprisingly scarce, with only one or two being seen each day, in the Liwa and in other parts of western Abu Dhabi. Colin found good numbers of migrants in the Liwa during March 1988 but during July migrants were exceptionally scarce, in fact limited to only two swallows *Hirundo rustica* during the period I was there.

With one or two tiny exceptions the whole of the coastal zone west of Abu Dhabi to the border with Saudi Arabia is low-lying subkha. These salt flats are sterile, devoid of vegetation and thus inhospitable to bird life. Not the best place for a midsummer bird survey but at least at this time one can be confident that all the birds found would be residents. Away from centres of habitation the only



species regularly noted were hoopoe lark, black-crowned finch lark and great grey shrike. All towns had extensive areas of irrigated gardens and forestry projects and so as soon as one got to inhabited areas like Ruwais (SB25), Ghayathi (SB24) or Sila (RB25) palm dove, Eurasian collared dove, house sparrow, white-cheeked bulbul and rufous bushchat would be found. Ghayathi is an isolated town 50 kms inland and has broad boulevarded streets with much irrigation. It held rose-ringed parakeets *Psittacula krameri*, olivaceous warbler *Hippolais pallida* and graceful warbler. There were a number of Namaqua dove *Oena capensis* in Ghayathi, Ruwais and Sila.

The desert lark *Anuomus deserti* is a scarce inhabitant of western Abu Dhabi, mainly because it requires rocky hills, a scarce habitat in that region. I found them in squares SB25 and TA25. Looking for other desert larks at a rocky hill in RB25 I discovered instead a pair of bar-tailed desert larks *A. cincturus*, a new square for this scarce species in the UAE. A single pallid swift *Apus pallida* was seen on the coast at SA25 and may breed somewhere in the low rocky hillocks nearby. There were reed beds at Ruwais which were strangely quiet although I did see a pair of moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* with young there. Raptor sightings were very few and limited to a single kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and osprey *Pandion haliaetus* in SB25.

Seabirds and coastal species in this region included white-cheeked tern *Sterna repressa*, Saundar's little tern *S. saundersi* and Kentish plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. There were also occasional reef herons *Egretta gularis* and Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* to be seen. Early migrants included whimbrel *Nuuentius phaeopus*, terek sandpiper *Xenus cineria*, greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and greater sandplover *Charadrius leschenaulti*.

Land bird migrants were limited to a few swallows and sand martins *Riparia riparia* and single examples of Eurasian roller *Coracias garrulus* and a hoopoe *Upupa epops*.

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Fig 17. The population of the bearded vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* has declined over much of its Arabian range. The reasons are unclear.